THE N64 ENCYCLOPEDIA

EVERY GAME RELEASED FOR THE NINTENDO 64

INCLUDES ALL JAPANESE AND 64DD GAMES

THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE

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To Mum and Dad: the Nintendo 64 was the first console I bought myself, so technically there's no need to thank you this time, but it would have been pretty hard to buy the thing if I hadn't been alive in the first place, so I'll always be grateful to you both for making me actually exist. And on the bright side, hopefully I've finally come up with a dedication that won't make Mum cry, haha!

To my wee brother Kevin: nothing will ever beat the countless times we played each other at ISS 64 for the Bear Cup, or spent hours doing a 40-man, pinfalls-only Royal Rumble in No Mercy. Those were the greatest moments in my gaming life and that's because of you. Cheers again bold yin.

To my incredible wife Louise: this has been one hell of a difficult year and your patience as I juggled two books and a full-time job has been beyond belief. I love you so much for trusting me to know my own limits, and not saying 'Told you so' when I crossed them over and over again.

And finally, to my gorgeous daughter Serena. At this point you're just getting the hang of how to move an analogue stick, which means you've probably still got a few years to go before yer da's making you try the likes of Jikkyou Powerful Pro Yakyuu 2000. And that's fine by me, because you're already growing up quickly enough as it is and I'm constantly astonished at the funny, intelligent girl you're becoming. I love you with all my heart.

FOREWORD

Long before Nintendo's Wii project coined the term, Nintendo 64 was a revolution.

It's difficult to describe to those who weren't there just how mind blowing it was to go from the comparatively limited 2D games of the time, to freely pirouetting around Peach's 3D castle grounds, swooping between a mighty AT-AT's legs behind the controls of a Snowspeeder, and dancing on the majestic waves as dusk set across Sunset Bay.

3D had been done before on PC and the likes of Sega Saturn, of course, but not like this, not with this level of freedom, finesse, and conviction. While other early 3D developers seemingly couldn't imagine beyond on-rails shooters and isometric platformers, Nintendo's peerless EAD utterly revolutionised three-dimensional movement and camera control with Super Mario 64, legitimately resetting expectations for what games could be and setting standards for decades to come.

Mario's stunning analog stick precision, the revelation of four-player GoldenEye 007, Star Fox's visceral controller-shaking explosions, the unforgettable dynamic soundtrack of Banjo-Kazooie and discovering *that* vast Hyrule Field vista in Ocarina of Time are treasured memories that will remain etched in the minds of N64 fans forever.

And that's without touching on the rich legacies created by little known debuts such as Super Smash Bros., Animal Crossing (Japan-only), Mario Party and Paper Mario, alongside the stone-cold classics F-Zero X, Conkey's Bad Fur Day, Pilotwings 64, Majora's Mask and Perfect Dark.

It was a golden era for beloved developer Rare, with the beloved UK developer turning out hit-after-hit with the likes of Jet Force Gemini, Blast Corps, Diddy Kong Racing, Banjo-Kazooie/Tooie and Donkey Kong 64 supporting Nintendo's own brilliant output – and that's without mentioning GoldenEye 007, Perfect Dark, Conker's Bad Fur Day and more. Has there ever been a more prolific output from any developer during a console generation?

For me, Nintendo 64 offered a glimpse of what video games could be. Beyond its captivating worlds, it pushed the social side of gaming more than any platform before. With an unprecedented four controller ports, N64 was the ultimate party console and some of the best multiplayer games ever were born within its cartridges.

The likes of Mario Kart 64, Super Smash Bros., WWF No Mercy, Mario Party, Diddy Kong Racing, Mario Tennis and of course, GoldenEye 007, brought four friends together in split-screen utopia that, given the boom of online gaming in the generation that followed, has never truly been matched since in terms of local multiplayer. Instant, global networking is convenient, but it can't quite replicate the feeling of snatching victory within breathing distance of your sobbing rival.

Nintendo 64 is probably not Nintendo's greatest console – third-party developers in particular really didn't show up to the party, ending the company's market dominance up until then - but it arguably pushed the medium forward more than any other system, with a legacy that can still be seen in video games today. And for that reason, it remains my - and many other players' – favourite games console ever. Viva la revolución.

Andy Robinson
Editor, Video Games Chronicle (VGC)

INTRODUCTION

The Nintendo 64 launched in the UK a month before my 14th birthday. For most of my life (as documented in my previous Encyclopedias), I was thoroughly immersed in all things video games, but the fact I was a kid and the fact that my parents understandably weren't keen on raising a spoilt wee sod meant that I usually got consoles either at Christmas or when people were selling them second-hand in the local classified sections, while I almost always got games when they were down to around half price. What can I say, it was pre-internet, so the old 'FOMO' wasn't anywhere near as pervasive.

The Nintendo 64, however, was the first ever console I got on launch day, and I did it by making the ultimate sacrifice. A local video game shop accepted my offer: on 1 March 1997 I would arrive at their door with my Sega Mega Drive and around 80 games, and hand it all over in exchange for a Nintendo 64 with just one game, Super Mario 64. In hindsight it was a ridiculous decision for both parties: I was giving up an enormous library of great games, and they were taking on stock that would take a while to shift, but at the time the N64 was such a huge leap forward for Nintendo – and my favourite series, Mario, in particular – that I didn't regret a single thing about it. It's quite fitting on a personal level, then, that my previous book was the *Mega Drive & Genesis Encyclopedia*, because just as that 13-year-old me moved on from Sega's 16-bit console to the N64, so too does my series of books about them 25 years later.

The Nintendo 64 was partly built with multiplayer games in mind: after all, the thing had four controller ports on it, when only two was considered the norm. The fact I wasn't quite old enough to head off to university or have situations where I was heading back home from the pub with a group of pals, meant that at the time I was very rarely witness to the joys of four-player GoldenEye 007 or Mario Kart 64. I had to hope that my brother's pal – the only other person we knew who owned an N64 – and his brother were willing to come over with two controllers, which only happened on rare occasions. Despite this, some of my best multiplayer experiences in my life were on that console, partly because my brother and I spent countless hours competing against each other on International Superstar Soccer 64, and working together as a tag team in the various THQ and AKI wrestling games (starting with WCW vs nWo World Tour and working all the way through to WWF No Mercy).

ISS 64 is actually a prime example of why this series of books exists. Although it received high praise at the time in the UK as one of the best launch window N64 games, over time the ISS games have generally taken a backseat to other Nintendo 64 gems, and when you look at top 10 lists it rarely appears (especially in North America, where football games are generally ignored for the most part anyway). It's games like this, therefore, that the *N64 Encyclopedia* is designed to cater for. Naturally, the likes of Super Mario 64, GoldenEye 007 and The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time are in here, complete with gushing text trying to get across in mere written words just how important they were in shaping the future landscape of video games.

As with my previous books, though, it's games like ISS 64 that the *N64 Encyclopedia* is mainly trying to address. Millions of people fought their friends in Super Smash Bros., got jiggy with it in Banjo-Kazooie and literally felt the difference of the Rumble Pak in Star Fox 64 (or Lylat Wars, if you prefer), but almost every N64 owner also had fond experiences with other games that may not have been so popular. Maybe you and your friends had regular all-night NBA Hangtime sessions, or maybe as a kid you were obsessed with Toy Story 2: Buzz Lightyear to the Rescue. Perhaps you learned to count playing Elmo's Number Journey, or perhaps you took a punt on Snowboard Kids and realised it had been worth it. Whatever your personal history with

the Nintendo 64 is, you'll find it in here. And, for the first time in this series of books, every Japanese title is included too (including all 10 Nintendo 64DD games), meaning if you were an importer then your past is covered here as well.

As ever, thank you so much for reading this book. The only reason I continue to get to write them is because people like you continue to buy them, and I can't stress enough how fortunate that makes me feel. Please do contact me on Twitter @scully1888 and let me know what you think of it, and please do review it online if you can: the more word spreads, the more books there'll be. Speaking of which, I hope to see you again next time for the fifth instalment in the series, in which I'll be taking a look at another four-player console that deserved more love than it got: the Sega Dreamcast.

With love,
Chris Scullion

THE HISTORY OF THE NINTENDO 64

Nintendo had been enjoying huge success in the home video game market in the early '90s, but it was also aware that it was going to have to start planning ahead if it was going to remain the top dog. Its NES console may have been the most dominant 8-bit system worldwide by a considerable distance, but its 16-bit successor, the SNES, wasn't having a similarly easy ride thanks to the huge strides being made by Sega. Its 16-bit Mega Drive / Genesis console was so well-received thanks to games like Sonic the Hedgehog that it served as legitimate competition to the SNES and even outsold it in some regions. What's more, following a rather public backtrack that saw Nintendo bowing out of a partnership deal announced with Sony, Nintendo was aware that Sony was going ahead with the 'PlayStation' project it had previously planned to create with it, meaning even more competition than just Sega would be on the way soon. The SNES may have still had some life left in it, but a successor would need to enter development.

On 23 August 1993, at its Shoshinkai trade show, Nintendo's president Hiroshi Yamauchi announced Project Reality. This was a massive strategic partnership with Silicon Graphics, the company whose obscenely detailed computer graphics workstations were used in such ground-breaking special effects movies as *Jurassic Park* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. While Nintendo's new console obviously wasn't going to pull off movie-quality CGI visuals, its partnership with such a tech powerhouse was still making its intent clear: the next Nintendo system would have jaw-dropping graphics capabilities. What's more, it was going to be available by the end of 1995 for $250.

In June 1994, Nintendo announced that its upcoming console was going to be called Ultra 64, and that it already had a 'dream team' of developers working on games for it, including the likes of Rare, Acclaim, DMA Design, Ocean and flight sim experts Paradigm Entertainment. It also signed a licensing deal with Midway to produce arcade games with Ultra 64 branding, to suggest that they were running on Ultra 64 technology. Even though the tech wasn't really similar, the arcade releases of Killer Instinct and Cruis'n USA continued to build hype for this mythical Ultra 64 console. Then, in November 1995, at another of its Shoshinkai shows, Nintendo revealed the final design for the console, along with a new name: Nintendo 64.

By the time the Nintendo 64 name was announced, Nintendo had already conceded that its new system wasn't going to be ready by the end of 1995 after all, so it was scheduled for an April 1996 launch instead. It was then delayed again to June 1996, and wouldn't be releasing worldwide as Nintendo had originally planned: while these steps were necessary, they also marked the first of the N64's stumbles. Sony's much-hyped PlayStation and Sega's Saturn had already been released in Japan at the end of 1994, and now Nintendo fans were expected to wait until mid-1996 in Japan, and even longer in the west, to get their hands on what Nintendo considered the next generation of gaming. It promised it would be worth the wait, however.

For many, it was. The Nintendo 64 finally launched in Japan on 23 June 1996, then came to North America on 29 September 1996 (infuriatingly for Europeans, their region wouldn't get it until 1 March 1997). The launch titles differed for each region, but one constant was Super Mario 64, one of the most ground-breaking,

genre-defining games ever released. With Super Mario 64 alone, Nintendo had made its mark on the next generation of video games. Sony and Sega may have made polygonal games the 'new normal' by the time the N64 had arrived, but Super Mario 64 showed exactly how the jump from 2D to 3D could truly revolutionise the way games were played.

The games themselves were only part of Nintendo's attempts to put its personal stamp on how polygonal gaming should progress, however. The Nintendo 64's real secret weapon – and something Nintendo offered at launch that neither Sega nor Sony initially did – was its unique new controller, which included an analogue stick (or a Control Stick, as Nintendo preferred to call it). Although analogue control methods had existed in home consoles ever since the days of the Atari 2600, the Nintendo 64 was the first major system to include analogue controls as standard at launch, meaning every player was able to navigate the polygonal 3D worlds of its games using a control method accurate enough to cater for the extra level of depth this new dimension provided. Such was the impact of the Control Stick that it's practically impossible to imagine having to direct Mario around Bob-Omb Battlefield or subtly tweak your Pilotwings 64 aircraft's flight direction with a conventional D-Pad. The Nintendo 64's polygon-pushing power may have been its main selling point on paper, but it was the controller that was revolutionising the way we played games.

It wasn't just the controller itself that was a hugely important part of the Nintendo 64: the number of controllers the console supported was also a key decision. The N64 included four controller ports as standard, instead of forcing players to buy separate multi-taps for games involving more than two players. This was transformative for many households and student dorms as marathon four-player sessions of GoldenEye 007, Mario Kart 64, Super Smash Bros. and the like became commonplace worldwide.

The Nintendo 64 was also a console designed with the future in mind. The controllers contained small expansion slots on the back which players could use to plug in peripherals. At launch this was limited to Controller Paks, small memory cards which stored a modest 256KB of save game data for some third-party games. But before long this also included the Rumble Pak – which brought battery-powered force feedback to the masses – and the Transfer Pak, which enabled data from some Game Boy cartridges to be passed over to certain N64 games. The flexibility of the slot meant that particularly inventive developers could make use of it in their own ways, with the likes of microphones and even heart rate sensors. Meanwhile, another port on the top of the console eventually allowed players to plug in an Expansion Pak, which doubled the N64's RAM from 4MB to 8MB, meaning some developers could activate high-res graphics modes or include new features that the stock N64 was incapable of handling. There was even an expansion slot on the bottom of the system for the Nintendo 64DD add-on, but we'll get to that in the Japanese section of the book.

Ultimately, the Nintendo 64 has gone down as one of the most iconic consoles ever created. Although its sales figures never really came close to those of the NES and SNES, and finished a distant second place behind the juggernaut that was the Sony PlayStation, those who did own the console fondly remember it as one that provided them with of some of the most thoroughly entertaining gaming experiences of their entire lives. Many long-term players still have their Nintendo 64 at home because they can't bear to part with it, and even though these days its games may not hold up as well visually as those of other systems (even those of its era), there are still a host of legitimate gems that continue to be hugely enjoyable to play to this day.

And speaking of the games, let's get to them.

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Nintendo

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Is it worth the wait?

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NINTENDO 64

Nintendo

THE GAMES

When Nintendo first properly revealed its Nintendo 64 console at its Shoshinkai show in 1995, its president Hiroshi Yamauchi made a speech on the first day of the show. Yamauchi explained that Nintendo's focus for the Nintendo 64 was on providing the best quality titles, rather than trying to release a large number of them. The implication was that Nintendo was already aware that the N64 wasn't going to have the biggest library; and this was something that would come to pass, with a little more than 400 games released for the console worldwide.

If you already own the *NES Encyclopedia* or *SNES Encyclopedia* (or the *Mega Drive and Genesis Encyclopedia*, for that matter) you'll see that each book is packed with anything from 800 to 1,000 games, many of which take up a quarter or half of a page. Meanwhile, have a quick flick through this section and you'll see that the vast majority of the games get either a full page or half page. The reason for this is simple: the Nintendo 64 just didn't have a lot of games in the grand scheme of things compared to its predecessors.

There were a number of reasons for this, but the most important one was the storage medium Nintendo chose to adopt. While Sony and Sega had opted for optical CD-based media for its PlayStation and Saturn consoles, Nintendo stubbornly chose to stick with cartridges. Cartridge-based software obviously had its benefits, most obviously when it came to loading times. While PlayStation and Saturn games often had lengthy loading times, loading was practically non-existent in the vast majority of N64 titles. Putting games on cartridges also meant that some (though not all) games could allow players to save their progress directly onto the cart, something not possible on a read-only format like a CD.

These benefits were arguably outweighed, however, by numerous drawbacks. The cartridge format meant that developers could only work with a fraction of the storage space that CDs offered at the time. Whereas a PlayStation disk could hold up to 660MB of data, the majority of Nintendo 64 cartridges held between 4–32MB, with the absolute largest games like Resident Evil 2 holding 64MB, a tenth of the PlayStation's capacity. Another major drawback was the cost involved in making these cartridges (especially those with more storage). CDs, even Sony's proprietary ones, were significantly cheaper to manufacture than N64 cartridges were, and the result was that N64 games tended to be more expensive: not only for the customer buying them, but for the publisher making them in the first place, for whom releasing an N64 game was often a bigger financial risk because of the upfront costs involved.

None of this is to say that the Nintendo 64's library is bad, far from it. In total, a little more than 300 games were released on the Nintendo 64 in the west, and you'll find them all in this section of the book. This book may feel a little more spacious than previous books in the series thanks to it having less than half the games than the NES, SNES and Mega Drive books, but it could be argued that the general quality of titles in this book is on average higher than those of previous systems. Of course, the N64 had its fair share of stinkers like any other console, but it also had a wealth of high-quality titles and a decent number of hidden gems in there too.

One final point to note: every screenshot in this book was captured using original Nintendo 64 hardware modified with an UltraHDMI upgrade (which adds an HDMI output to the console). This allowed me to capture N64 games at their highest quality output, instead of resorting to software emulation (which can often provide inaccurate results). Despite this, it's worth being in mind that the Nintendo 64 had a number of display resolutions for its games, with the lowest being 240p. As such, some of the screens in this book may be a little on the blurry side, but they do accurately represent the way these games looked and so you can expect screenshot quality to vary on a game-by-game basis.

NINTENDO 64

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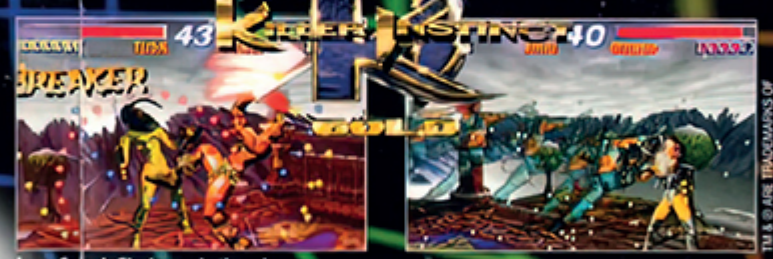

Iago, Spinal, Glacius and others in an all new fighting extravaganza

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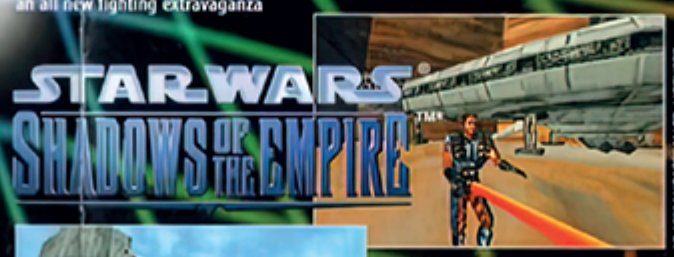

Darth Vader has sent his forces to engage the rebels in battle.

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Original Nintendo Seal of Quality

1080° SNOWBOARDING

Year	1998
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo EAD

WHEN IT COMES to initial entries in console encyclopedias, you'd be hard pressed to find a better first foot forward than 1080° Snowboarding. A first-party snowboarding title created by Nintendo's prestigious EAD studio and produced by Shigeru Miyamoto, 1080° revolutionised the genre with its surprisingly realistic handling. Although there had been snowboarding games before it – most notably the Cool Boarders series on PlayStation – 1080° quickly gained a reputation as the most satisfying representation of the sport, thanks in part to the way it handled different types of snow. Racing through areas where the snow is thicker will slow your boarder down, while some sections are covered with a sheet of ice that lets you travel extremely quickly but can make turning a nightmare.

It's the way 1080° controls that makes it so memorable. It's not quite an all-out arcade racer, but it's far from a serious, complex sim either. Acceleration is automatic, but players can hold the Z trigger to crouch and build up speed. Tricks can be pulled off in-air, but landing is far from a given: players have to not only line up their board with the snow to ensure smooth contact with the ground, but also have to hold Z as they're about to land so they can bend their knees and keep their balance. Failure to do either can result in a tumble, meaning every time your boarder leaves the ground you have to stay alert. This can lead to a slightly difficult time for complete beginners, but the eventual result is a deeply satisfying experience when you start pulling off perfect landings on huge, risky jumps.

There are initially five characters to choose from, each with their own stats. American boarder Rob Haywood is the best choice for starters, being your typical all-rounder, while Japanese pro Kensuke Kimachi is similar but has slightly weaker stats. Kensuke's compatriot Akari Hayami and Canadian 14-year-old Ricky Winterborn are the rookies of the game: neither are very fast but they have good technique, jump and balance. Finally, the appropriately named Dion Blaster is an English boarder whose top speed is unmatched but is about as steady as a newborn calf. With a bit of skill you can eventually unlock some silly extra characters, including a panda suit and gold and silver metallic boarders. As for where this motley crew are riding, 1080° may only have six courses, but what it lacks in quantity it certainly offers in quality. Whether it's the sneaky tree-infested shortcut in Golden Forest, the slippery concrete roads at the end of Mountain Village or the extremely narrow, torch-lit bridges in Dragon Cave, each course has its own defining features that make it a pleasure to re-run them to try to better your times.

FACT

In 2021, 1080° programmer Giles Goddard created a spiritual successor called Carve Snowboarding, which was released on Virtual Reality devices. So if you ever felt 1080° was sorely missing motion sickness, track it down.

1080° was successful enough to spawn a GameCube sequel, the entertaining 1080° Avalanche. By that point, though, the gaming world was positively snowed under by similar titles, with the SSX series in particular taking over the chilly crown. As such, Avalanche could never quite have hoped to have the same impact as its predecessor, meaning the N64 original is the one people remember most fondly to this day. ■

AERO FIGHTERS ASSAULT

Year 1997
Publisher Video System
Developer Paradigm Entertainment

AERO FIGHTERS ASSAULT is the sixth and final game in the Aero Fighters series (known as the Sonic Wings series in Japan). Whereas all the other titles were vertically scrolling shoot 'em ups, however, Assault is a completely different type of game, instead offering third-person dogfighting shenanigans in open environments. The story revolves around Fata Morgana (wrongly named Phutta Morgana in the North American manual), an alien military organisation that was also responsible for a variety of attacks in the previous games. This time it's detonated a heat-generating bomb in the Antarctic (don't they all generate heat?), which has resulted in major seaboard cities like Tokyo and New York becoming flooded. As the world's ground units are immobilised and naval forces are concentrating on saving the enormous numbers of refugees created by the flooding, it's up to the UN's special Project Blue force to head out and take on Fata Morgana. Although Assault plays entirely differently to the other Aero Fighters games it does still have some arcade-like elements: despite the more realistic flight sim appearance there's still an emphasis here on scoring points. As you take on the various missions in the likes of Tokyo, the Pacific Ocean, a desert and the Antarctic, bonus points are scored for all manner of things like how many of your wingmen survived, how much time was remaining and whether you still have a full stock of certain weapons. Gain enough points and you can take part in special bonus stages: unlock all three of these and the game ends with a special fourth one set in space. ■

FACT

It's possible to unlock a special X-28 ATD experimental aircraft, whose pilot is a dolphin called Spanky.

AEROGAUGE

Year 1997
Publisher ASCII Entertainment
Developer Locomotive Corporation

AEROGAUGE ARRIVED ON the N64 a number of months before F-Zero X did, meaning for a while it and Extreme G were players' only real options when it came to futuristic racing. It's set in 2063, where the International Formula Association decides to create a new racing series that makes use of Sky Step Class flying cars. As in Nintendo's series, each of the vehicles (known here as Aeromachines) is piloted by a different character, and each can travel at fairly fast speeds. Unlike in F-Zero games, however, AeroGauge also lets players control the vertical height of their ship rather than simply steering it left and right. This makes it feel almost like a racing version of Star Fox instead. While AeroGauge was an interesting take on futuristic racing it did have its issues. Critics were unhappy with its extreme pop-in, which even by the Nintendo 64's standards was quite severe, with entire buildings and tunnels appearing almost right in front of the player. The game's high level of difficulty was also met with criticism: even at the easiest difficulty setting it's often a regular occurrence to finish in last place until you master the game's tricky Drift Dash boost mechanic, which involves holding the Z button as you turn, letting go of A then quickly pressing it again. It was never quite going to challenge F-Zero X, but for a while AeroGauge was one of the top dogs in the futuristic racing genre on Nintendo 64, if only on a technicality. ■

FACT

UK publication *N64 Magazine* hated AeroGauge so much it not only 'awarded' a score of 10 per cent, but also gave out the phone number for ASCII's UK office in case anyone wanted to complain.

AIDYN CHRONICLES: THE FIRST MAGE

Year	2001
Publisher	THQ
Developer	H20 Entertainment

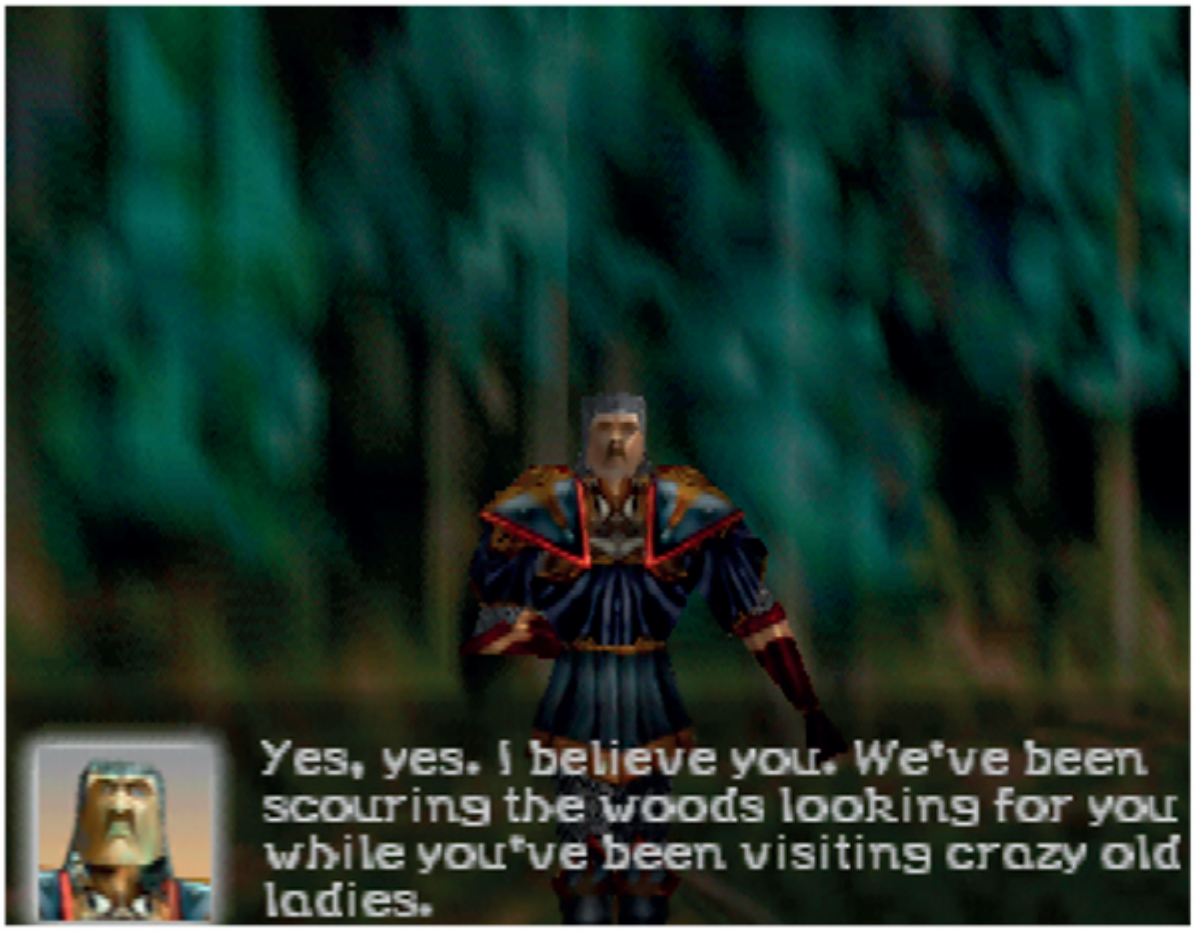
THIS INTERESTING RPG was developed by H2O Entertainment, the US-based studio best known for Tetrisphere. It tells the story of Alaron, a headstrong young squire who was orphaned as a child and adopted by the King. When he hears that a farmer called Kendall has gone missing, Alaron heads out to find him, but instead encounters a gang of goblins who poison him, causing him to fall unconscious. After a disturbing dream Alaron wakes up to find he's been rescued by a healer called Oriana, who tells him she can't cure whatever poison he's been inflicted with. Upon returning to the Castle, Alaron is ordered by the King to set off with a group of other adventurers to try and find an antidote. Naturally, without spoiling too much, the poison is only the tip of an unusual iceberg that Alaron is about to happily Titanic his way right into.

The combat system in Aidyn Chronicles is similar to that of many turn-based RPGs but players also have to take their characters' positioning into account, as party members and enemies are both able to wander around the battle area. Outside of battle, Aidyn can use the 'camp' option any time he likes while he's exploring. Camping outside comes with its risks, though: if you can successfully camp without distraction your party will regain their lost stamina and endurance points, but occasionally you'll be ambushed by monsters while camping, meaning if your party's stats are low it's a gamble (one that can be avoided by renting a room at an inn instead).

FACT

One particular recruitable character named Sholeh will only join your party if there's space for her the first time you talk to her. This means literally killing off one of your party members to make room for her, which feels a bit harsh.

One of the main criticisms levelled at the game is how long everything takes: actions during battles have rather long animations and can take a while to perform. Given that dodging attacks can be fairly frequent at times, this leads to situations where even the most basic of battles can take a few minutes to beat, while larger fights – when you have a full party and a bunch of reasonably powered enemies to battle – can often take upwards of 20 or 30 minutes. Alaron's slow running speed was the other notable problem critics raised, as with no fast-track option players would regularly find themselves spending an inordinate amount of time travelling between locations due to the protagonist deciding that a brisk jog is the fastest pace he can bring himself to muster.



Despite these criticisms, those who stuck with the game through its slower moments did have some praise for its depth and its sense of humour. The game's lead designer was Chris Klug, who had previously designed the second version of DragonQuest and had written a popular adventure module for Dungeons & Dragons, and together with writer Angela Ferraiolo created an entertaining script with some fun jokes in there. Anyone who can put up with its glacial pace and a battle system that arguably hasn't aged well may therefore find a surprisingly entertaining story hidden inside Aidyn Chronicles: the problem is more that it takes particularly strong willpower to reach that point. ■

AIRBOARDER 64

Year	1998
Publisher	Human Entertainment / Gaga Interactive
Developer	Human Entertainment

CONVENIENTLY SET IN the year 2064, AirBoarder 64 is a futuristic take on the Tony Hawk series that replaces skateboards with AirBoards, a floating board that hovers 50cm above the ground. There are three game modes: Street Work, Time Attack and Coin. Street Work is less seedy than it sounds, and is simply a score attack mode where you're given a set time to perform stunts and rack up the highest score possible. Time Attack places a number of checkpoints in a stage and tasks you with hitting them all in order as quickly as you can. Finally, Coin is a more laid-back mode where you're given a generous time limit to collect a set number of coins dotted around the level. There are five stages to choose from – Green Park, Lost Forest, Snow Festival 64, Sunset Island and Giant House – all of which are open, non-linear environments like those found in the Tony Hawk games. Finally, there are a total of eight playable characters (four initially, with four unlockable), each with their own stats and their own preference for riding either a regular or goofy stance. Despite its best efforts AirBoarder 64 was met with middling reviews by critics, mainly due to its slow pace and its awkward controls. Special note, however, should go to the Giant House stage, which does what it says on the tin and gives the impression that you're a tiny hoverboarder zooming around an enormous home, ducking underneath beds and using mouseholes as tunnels to other rooms. ■

FACT

ASCII Entertainment planned to release Air Boarder 64 in North America as AirBoardin' USA but it ultimately never happened.

ALL STAR TENNIS '99

Year	1999
Publisher	Ubisoft
Developer	Smart Dog

UBISOFT'S NINTENDO 64 take on tennis featured American pro Michael Chang (who had previously reached the world number 2 ranking a couple of years earlier) as its cover star. Chang was one of 12 players available in the game, eight of whom were actual real-life players (Chang, Amanda Coetzer, Jana Novotna, Conchitz Martinez, Gustavo Kuerten, Jonas Bjorkman, Mark Philippoussis and Richard Krajicek). Joining them are four fictional characters, including British player Zoe Taylor – presumably in there because the actual best British women's tennis player at the time was ranked 137th – and an American called Vanessa Child who bears more than a passing resemblance to Venus Williams. The game itself is a relatively slow-paced tennis game that initially looks like it favours realism over anything too over-the-top. It only takes playing through a couple of sets to realise, however, that Ubisoft couldn't resist throwing in some odd gimmicks to at least make things a little silly should players wish. These include the interesting Bomb Mode, where every time the ball bounces a bomb is created in its place, meaning players have to navigate a bomb-riddled court without being blasted onto their backside. Also present are a couple of over-the-top special moves, one of which creates a wormhole in the middle of the court that blasts the ball out at an extremely fast speed. Oddly, you can only turn these off for human opponents, meaning you can't have a normal game of tennis against the CPU (unless your idea of 'normal' is Donnie Darko). ■

FACT

The French version of the game is called Yannick Noah All Star Tennis 99, even though Yannick Noah isn't a playable character.

ALL-STAR BASEBALL 99

Year	1998	✔ ✔ ✘
Publisher	Acclaim Sports	
Developer	Iguana Entertainment	

ALTHOUGH THE NINTENDO 64 had a noticeably smaller library than that of the NES and SNES, it still had its fair share of American sports games, including Acclaim's All-Star Baseball series. Acclaim had released the first All-Star game on the PlayStation and Saturn the previous year, before deciding to bring the series to Nintendo consoles instead. All-Star Baseball 99, therefore, was a Nintendo 64 console exclusive with only a Game Boy Color port accompanying it. The game not only features the full Major League Baseball licence (meaning all the team names and logos are present), but also boasts the MLBPA licence, meaning all player names and likenesses are all correct.

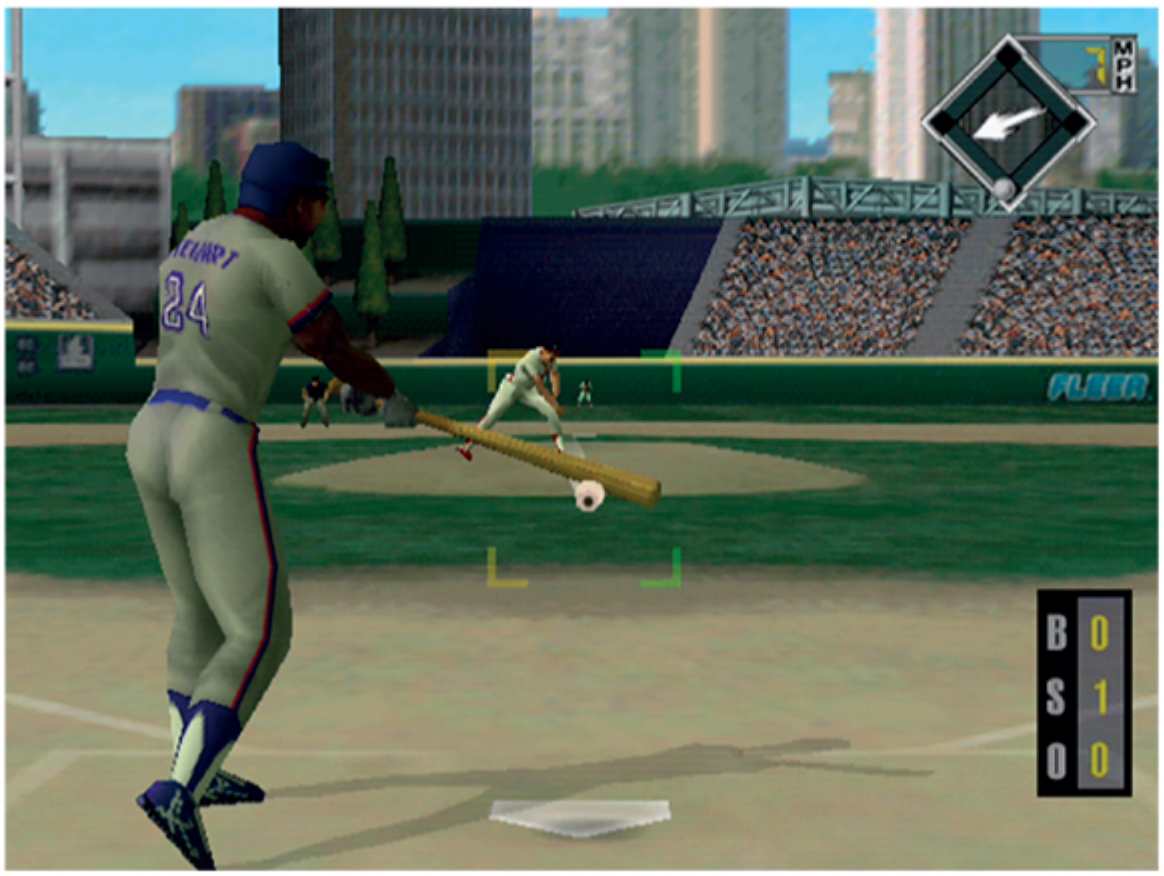
Much like Acclaim's other major N64 sporting series NFL Quarterback Club, All-Star Baseball 99 (and its sequels) made use of the Nintendo 64's hi-res mode, presenting the action in 480i resolution (instead of the more conventional 240p) and making things look generally sharper as a result. This, combined with the default camera's close-up view just behind home plate, made the game noticeably visually superior to previous baseball games on the SNES.

The MLB licence goes beyond simply including the logos and uniforms here. All 30 Major League Baseball stadiums are also included in the game, '3D rendered down to the cut of the grass' according to the back of the box, which is ever so slightly hyperbolic unless baseball fields have completely flat grass. Add to this over 600 player animations and around 100 unique batter stances, along with (fairly repetitive) play-by-play commentary by New York Yankees broadcasters John Sterling and Michael Kay and it was clear that Acclaim was keen on providing the most authentic baseball game released up to that point.

Although on the field it took its baseball seriously, All-Star Baseball 99 did have its fair share of silly cheats that could be entered to make things a little more entertaining. By entering ABBTNCSTLO (a reference to comedy duo Abbot and Costello) the game would mess with players weights, making some of them extremely fat and some comically skinny. Meanwhile, adding the code GOTHELIUM ('Got helium?') would activate the obligatory big head mode that was all the rage during the early polygonal era. Perhaps best of all, entering the code PRPPAPLYR would make all the players completely flat and 2D, the code being a reference to PlayStation rhythm game PaRappa the Rapper.

FACT

While promoting the game, Midway posted a comparison chart showing All-Star Baseball 99's features compared to 'Junior's Game' (MLB Featuring Ken Griffey Jr) and 'That Catcher's Game' (Mike Piazza's Strike Zone).



Clearly approving of such tomfoolery was the game's cover star. The role of cover star is always a big deal in sports titles and is the modern equivalent of appearing on a Wheaties box, and this time the prestigious honour was awarded to Colorado Rockies outfielder Larry Walker, who even got to introduce the game in the manual via words he absolutely, definitely, honestly wrote himself. 'You've got so much gameplay here', he allegedly says, 'I hope you don't forget to get to the ballpark! See you on base!' You certainly will, Larry, you certainly will. ■

ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2000

Year 1999
Publisher Acclaim Sports
Developer Iguana Entertainment

ALL-STAR BASEBALL 99 was such a success that Acclaim decided to stick with the Nintendo 64 for its successor. The main change in the 2000 edition is improved batting controls in the form of a new 3D batting cursor. In the previous game players simply moved a cursor to where they wanted to swing then pressed the A button, but this time the cursor can be rotated to let the player adjust how they hit the ball (assuming they hit it cleanly, that is). This means players can deliberately try to hit a grounder to advance their runners and load the bases, or even have a go at popping one into the air for a sacrifice fly. A new instant replay mode and Expansion Pak support round off the main additions. ■

FACT

In a publicity stunt Acclaim used All-Star Baseball 99 to predict that the New York Yankees would win the 1998 World Series 4–3, with Scott Brosius as MVP. It was close: the Yankees won 4–0 and the MVP was indeed Brosius.

ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2001

Year 2000
Publisher Acclaim Sports
Developer Iguana Entertainment

THE THIRD AND final N64 All-Star Baseball advances the series by the least amount, with only a handful of new features added to what was admittedly already considered an impressive baseball game. One big addition is a new Hall of Fame team to accompany the present-day squads: going by the name Cooperstown Legends, it includes the likes of Reggie Jackson and Nolan Ryan. Changes have also been made to the Arcade mode to make pitching and batting feel more streamlined than normal, making things play quicker. Other than that, however, there isn't much new here. As *Nintendo Power* magazine put it at the time: 'Last year's ASB was batting close to a thousand in the graphics department, and this year's version looks just as good (if not exactly the same)'. ■

FACT

One brilliant new addition is a park set in a cornfield, meaning players can play against the Cooperstown Legends there and recreate the iconic Kevin Costner movie Field of Dreams.

ARMORINES: PROJECT S.W.A.R.M.

Year 1999
Publisher Acclaim Entertainment
Developer Acclaim Studios London

ARMORINES WAS ACCLAIM'S second attempt to take the Turok 2 engine and adapt it to fit a licensed IP (having already done so with South Park a year earlier). Armorines is a first-person shooter based on a superhero team created by Valiant Comics, and is set in the future (some time in 'the third millennium') during an invasion of giant insectoid aliens simply referred to as the Bugs. After the Bugs pillage and ransack the entire world and overthrow its militaries, the ultimate decision is made: send in the Armorines. As the game itself puts it: 'The Armorines were the military option we hoped we'd never have to use. An advanced, virtually indestructible fighting force created to withstand even the devastation of a nuclear attack.' Which is nice and all, but something obviously went wrong during the design phase, because considering the protagonist can be killed after a couple of hits by a creepy-crawly I'm not convinced a nuke would leave them unscathed. Players can choose between one of two characters, each with their own combat styles. Tony Lewis has a plasma blaster for his main weapon (which fires slowly but is powerful) as well as a big rocket launcher, but is useless at close-quarters combat and relies instead on a shield to get out of scrapes. Myra Lane, meanwhile, has a less powerful but faster-firing energy rifle as her main weapon, along with a grenade launcher and a nifty cattle prod style weapon she can use for powerful melee attacks. ■

FACT

Turok and Shadow Man were also *Valiant* characters. If you're wondering why Acclaim had such an interest in Valiant Comics, it's because Acclaim bought Voyager Communications (which owned *Valiant*) in 1994.

ARMY MEN: AIR COMBAT

Year	2000	✔ ✕ ✕
Publisher	The 3DO Company	
Developer	The 3DO Company	

THE ARMY MEN series was something of a divisive one over the years. Originally starting off as a real-time strategy series on the PC, it didn't take long before The 3DO Company brought the series to consoles with Army Men: Sarge's Heroes (see later) as well as a number of spin-offs, including the one you see on this very page. Air Combat (known as Army Men: Air Attack on other systems) is a third-person helicopter game similar in style to EA's Desert Strike series, in which players take on a series of missions aboard a hefty chopper… albeit a plastic one.

That's because the main twist here – as you've no doubt already gathered – is that all the characters in the game are little plastic army men. In this case, there are two warring factions, the Greens and the Tans, and their rivalry shows no signs of easing any time soon. Indeed, things are about to properly kick off, as General Plastro of the Tan Army is planning a huge operation that will result in the Green Army's borders being seized, with war pretty much unavoidable. Playing as the Green Army's elite Alpha Wolf Squadron, you have to head out and gun down the Tans *en masse*, not resting until they're reduced to a big puddle of melted beige plastic.

You gain access to four different helicopters as you play through each of the game's 16 missions. Starting off with the fast-moving Huey (which is basically a Bell 212), you eventually get the Chinook (slow but can take a beating and carry a heavy load for rescue missions), Super Stallion (fast and powerful without too many compromises) and finally the Apache (the same chopper as the one in Desert Strike and easily the best of the bunch). You can also choose from a series of co-pilots who have each mastered one of the game's available weapons: Woodstock is a Vietnam veteran (or the plastic toy equivalent) who specialises in machine gunning, Rawhide is a cattle farmer who loves rocket launchers, Hardcore is a 'cocky and headstrong' chap who prefers homing rockets and, because it was made in the late '90s, the sole female option is Bombshell, who only became a co-pilot by 'using her beguiling charms to ride shotgun' with the pilot. Look, I didn't write the thing.

FACT

The decision to use army men in the series was actually an attempt to avoid censorship, because the German ratings board was clamping down hard on realistic violence at the time.

Gameplay is what you would likely expect from a 3D version of Desert Strike with the player using the stick to move the helicopter forward and back and rotate it, while pressing C-Left and C-Right strafes from side to side. We're not exactly talking Microsoft Flight Simulator here so you don't need to worry about altitude or anything like that, but you do also have access to a winch, which can be used to pick up items and rescue soldiers as the need arises. There's also a multiplayer mode called Officer's Club, where up to four players take part in mini-games involving hunting bugs, capturing flags, recovering food and rescuing scientists. ■

ARMY MEN: SARGE'S HEROES

Year	1999
Publisher	The 3DO Company
Developer	The 3DO Company

THE FIRST OF the Army Men titles to be released on Nintendo 64, Sarge's Heroes is a third-person action game where the player takes control of Sergeant Hawk, aka Sarge, the main protagonist of most of the entries in the series. Sarge is the leader of Bravo Company, and his five favourite soldiers make up the Bravo Company Commandos. As (bad) luck would have it though, General Plastro and his Tan Army launch a pre-emptive strike on the Greens' camp, causing a scene of devastation that leaves many of the Green soldiers 'mortally melted'. Even worse, all five of the Bravo Company Commandos have been captured, along with war correspondent Vikki (who just happens to be the daughter of Sarge's boss Colonel Grimm: well, that's where nepotism gets you). As Sarge, you have to make your way through 16 missions taking on the Tan Army as you try to rescue the Commandos and Vikki while trying to hunt down Plastro in the process.

Sarge's Heroes is played with a third-person viewpoint and, like many games from its era, can be a little harder to get used to these days because of its control system. The lack of a second stick means the N64's Control Stick is used to run and turn, while players have to hold down the C-Right button to toggle a strafing run. Sarge is initially armed with a standard issue M-16 assault rifle but as the game progresses he can also find the likes of a shotgun, M-60 machine gun, sniper rifle and even more exotic weapons like a bazooka, mortar and flamethrower.

The game's big twist, however, comes in the third mission where Sarge discovers that there are actually two worlds: the plastic world and the real world. By stepping through a portal into the latter Sarge suddenly realises that he is actually five inches tall and the world around him is enormous. This leads to the sort of Honey I Shrunk the Kids type you would expect from a game starring small toys, and as Sarge travels back and forth between worlds you find yourself in two very different scenarios: some stages play like a standard war game that simply has odd-looking soldiers, while others place Sarge in a series of real-world settings in which the environment is just as important as the action. One minute you're trying to find a Blue Spy in an enormous human-sized bathroom, the next you're taking on massive killer ants and ten-foot tall strands of grass in the garden. A child's sandbox becomes a sprawling desert while the final stages take place in a giant kitchen and living room, culminating in the Battle of the Staircase. Hey, you weren't there, man.

Despite the clear benefits of its clever premise, Sarge's Heroes was criticised at the time for its awkward control system and annoying camera. As such, it was only met with a middling reception by the games media, with review scores averaging at around 60 per cent. Unbeknownst to many at the time, this would actually make it one of the higher scoring Army Men games. ■

FACT

Vikki starred in her own spin-off platformer called Portal Runner, which was released on PS2. The PAL version's cover includes a questionable 97 per cent score by *PSE2* magazine.

ARMY MEN: SARGE'S HEROES 2

Year 2000
Publisher The 3DO Company
Developer The 3DO Company

THE SEQUEL TO Sarge's Heroes takes place where the first game left off, with the Tan Army in full retreat and their Field Marshall Tannenberg held hostage by the Greens. This should be cause for celebration but someone is conspicuous by his absence: the Tans' leader, Plastro. Plastro's still in the real world and is suffering from 'plastrification', a condition where spending too long in the real world turns army men into little plastic toys (sshhh, nobody tell them). He's saved, however, by the mysterious Brigitte Bleu of the Blue Resistance, who has developed a serum that reverses plastrification. Plastro takes over a toy shop in the real world and uses Brigitte's serum to create a new army of toys to destroy the Green Army for good, so off goes Sarge to stop him. Again. The gameplay in Sarge's Heroes 2 is much the same as that of its predecessor, but this time Sarge is joined by Vikki, who can be controlled in some of the stages. As before, the game's 17 stages jump between Sarge's world and the real world as players fight their way through such strange environments as the inside of a fridge-freezer, a gumball machine inside the toy store and a pool table, before the final battle takes place inside a pinball machine (because why not). Reception was much the same as that for the original Sarge's Heroes, with critics complaining that none of the issues from the first game had been addressed. ■

FACT

In the four years between 1998 and 2002, no fewer than 19 Army Men games were released, which is probably overkill however you look at it.

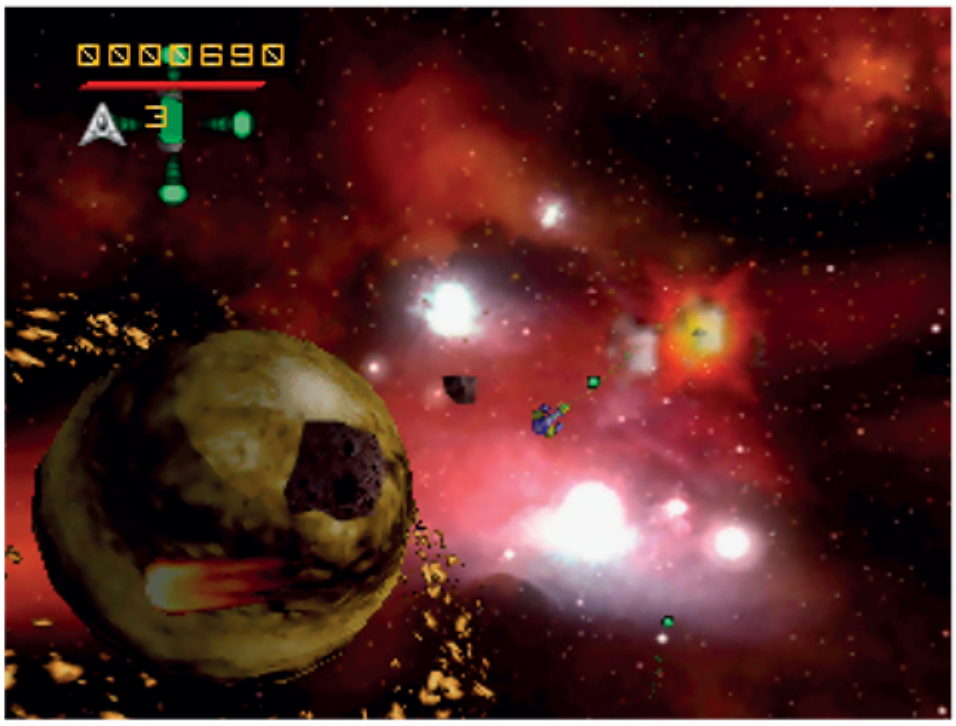
ASTEROIDS HYPER 64

Year 1999
Publisher Crave Entertainment
Developer Syrox Developments

ATARI'S CLASSIC 1979 arcade game Asteroids never had a plot, other than 'blow things up, please'. Naturally, 20 years later such simplicity wouldn't fly, so for its Nintendo 64 update Syrox and Crave decided to conjure up a new storyline in which the player is a pilot who's been recruited by the Astro-Mining Corporation to clear out debris-filled areas of space so it can conduct various mining operations there and make big money. Naturally, the majority of this debris consists of ruddy big asteroids, but luckily you're armed with a laser gun that can blow them into progressively smaller chunks until they're tiny enough to destroy for good. It turns out two decades doesn't actually make a lot of difference, because at its core Asteroids Hyper 64 plays very similarly to the Atari original, with players able to rotate their ship, use thrust rockets to move forwards and enter Hyperspace – in other words, teleport to another random part of the screen – to avoid collisions at the last minute. The game includes 90 stages split over six zones, but players would be forgiven for initially believing there isn't much variation because each zone's 15 stages have the same background and enemies. It isn't until you progress through the game that you eventually encounter new enemy types including alien eggs, extra-terrestrial crystals and cloaked asteroids (which fade in and out and can only be hit when they're fully visible). You can also collect power-ups including homing missiles and mines. ■

FACT

At one point in Stage 15 a special green vector asteroid flies past. If you can shoot it you'll unlock a port of the original 1979 version (albeit with the same modern sound effects from the main game).



AUTOMOBILI LAMBORGHINI

Year	1997
Publisher	Titus Software
Developer	Titus France

DIG OUT YOUR copy of *The SNES Encyclopedia* (what do you mean you don't have one? What a disgrace) and turn to page 105 to see Lamborghini American Challenge, a licensed racing game by French studio Titus Software. I'm sure I don't have to spell it out for you but Automobili Lamborghini is the successor to that game, replacing Titus's trusty sprite-based racing engine for a shiny new polygonal one (and a sturdy one at that, running smoother than most other N64 racing games and with solid car and track models that rarely show any glitching). There are four modes available to you in this game: Single Race and Time Trial are self-explanatory, while Arcade has you taking on a series of three tracks, with the aim being to win all three in a row otherwise it's Game Over. As well as the other five drivers racing alongside you Arcade mode also features a timer at the top of the screen that requires you to top it up regularly by driving through checkpoints: like numerous other racing games of the era that don't really balance this too well, it's actually possible to run out of time and get a Game Over while you're in first place, which makes a bit of a mockery of the system. Arcade Mode is split into two different sets of tracks – the Basic Series and the Pro Series – meaning there are six in total in the game. Naturally, the Basic tracks have

straightforward designs and are generally quite ovular, covering countryside, city and beachside environments, while the significantly more complex Pro tracks feature similar landscapes while throwing in some other gimmicks (ancient ruins, fog and racing through caves and canyons respectively). Each track has one or two shortcuts that are fairly easy to spot even at high speeds, but don't get too excited: most of them don't really save you much time and since you can lose some speed turning into them some of them actually let your opponents catch up with you a bit. The other main mode is Championship, which is your typical Mario Kart style system where you get points for each race depending on where you finish.

FACT

The Japanese version of the game is called Super Speed Race 64 and adds a handful of new features like weather effects and a new difficulty level.

Although you obviously start off with just Lamborghini cars to choose from – the Diablo and the Countach, specifically – by completing Arcade and Championship mode in various difficulties you can eventually unlock other cars based on the Porsche 959, Ferrari F50, Ferrari Testarossa, Dodge Viper, McLaren F1 and Bugatti EB110. While most races in each mode are simply a case of getting through each lap, in some longer races your fuel can run low or your tires can get worn. This introduces a pitstop element to proceedings, where you have to pull in and perform a mini-game: either using the Control Stick to fill your fuel tank, or spinning it quickly in circles to change your tyres. In all, Automobili Lamborghini is a solid enough racing game, if an unspectacular one. ■

BANJO-KAZOOIE

Year	1998
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Rare

USUALLY A PLATFORM game has to become much-loved before its protagonist is then chucked into a bunch of spin-offs, but Banjo the bear started of the opposite way, making his debut as one of the playable characters in Rare's Diddy Kong Racing. Eight months later, Banjo finally appeared in a starring role in his own game, and this time he wasn't alone. The original idea was that Banjo would have a backpack that could sprout wings and legs to help him traverse the various locations he would explore, but over time the game's designers at Rare decided that rather than make the bag a weird limb-sprouting organism it was probably a bit more sensible to put another character in the backpack and have them pop out whenever needed instead. The result was Kazooie, a cheery red 'breegull' who teams up with Banjo to form one of the most memorable partnerships in gaming, up there with Sonic & Tails, Mario & Luigi and um… Mortal & Kombat.

The game revolves around the kidnap of Banjo's little sister Tooty, who's been nabbed by the evil witch Gruntilda. In a plot device that has definitely never been done before with mirrors or anything, Gruntilda's cauldron tells her that she's no longer the fairest of them all (or words to that effect) and that Tooty is actually more of a looker. Incensed, Gruntilda captures Tooty and hooks her up to a machine that will, after a conveniently lengthy warming up period, transfer Tooty's beauty to Gruntilda. Off head Banjo and his birdy buddy Kazooie to confront Gruntilda and defeat her to get Tooty back.

Banjo-Kazooie is similar to Super Mario 64 in that both games have a hub area that branches off to numerous other stages: Gruntilda's Lair in the former, Peach's Castle in the latter. The player then has to explore these open-world stages in an attempt to find the collectibles that will let them unlock new areas in the hub, thereby opening up new worlds. While Super Mario 64 made this fairly simple by doing it with Stars, Banjo does things differently by offering both Jiggies and musical notes. The former are anthropomorphic jigsaw pieces that can be used to solve the various jigsaw puzzles dotted around Gruntilda's Lair: finishing one of these opens up a new world. The musical notes – of which there are 100 in each world – open other locked doors in the Lair so the player can access these jigsaws in the first place. It's an interesting mechanic that encourages further exploration: rather than just heading for the Jiggies, the player has to take their time and collect the notes too.

FACT

Banjo-Kazooie started off as a SNES platformer called Project Dream, which starred a young boy called Edison. It was eventually moved to the N64 and Edison was replaced by Banjo.

Ultimately, Banjo-Kazooie was recognised as one of the few titles of its era to challenge Super Mario 64's platform game crown. Its similar structure and free-roaming style opened it up to understandable comparisons, but its greater insistence on (comical) dialogue and the way the pair learned a wide variety of new moves as the game progressed – almost giving it more of a Metroidvania feel at times – ensured the game stood out in its own way. ■

BANJO-TOOIE

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Rare

IT'S BEEN TWO years since the events of Banjo-Kazooie (literally, in this case, given the release dates), and the nasty witch Gruntilda remains dead and buried. Well, buried at least, but dead? Not so much. During a storm, Gruntilda's sisters Mingella and Blobbelda dig her up and discover that she's been alive all this time, but her body has been reduced to a skeleton. Angry, she blows up Banjo's house (killing their mole friend Bottles in the process) and, together with her sisters, starts plans to use a special device called the Big-O-Blaster to extract all the life force from the world and use it to regrow her body. It's safe to say that there aren't many colourful platformers that open with its heroes setting off to avenge the death of a small animal friend, but that's what you get here so you might as well play the ball where it lies.

One of the main elements of the original Banjo-Kazooie was the way the pair would regularly learn new moves from Bottles (RIP), but there are no silly amnesia or 'it's been a couple of years, they're out of shape' storylines designed to remove their skills so the player can learn them all over again. Instead, the game begins with the plucky pair fully armed with all the moves they had by the end of their first adventure, and as they make their way through this sequel they learn even more new ones from Bottles' drill sergeant brother Jamjars. These include shooting eggs at enemies with a new first-person viewpoint, a new Bill Drill move (where the pair turn spin downwards at high speeds to break boulders and unscrew screws) and the laughably violent Breegull Blast, where Banjo grabs Kazooie by the legs and slams her downwards onto enemies.

FACT

The game was going to have a mode called Bottles' Revenge where a second player could control an undead Bottles and possess enemies to try and kill the heroes, but it was scrapped for time reasons.

There's one major new gimmick that changes everything, though. Eventually you'll start coming across special floor tiles called Split-Up Pads: step on these and our heroes will do a Lennon and McCartney and go their separate ways, letting you control each of them individually. When this happens, Banjo and Kazooie can each then learn a whole new set of unique moves. For example, now that Kazooie is no longer in Banjo's backpack, he can now take it off and use it as a weapon to attack enemies. Kazooie, meanwhile, also gets a bunch of extra techniques now that she's free of her cloth cocoon: she can glide off high ledges, leap high into the air and even sit on eggs to hatch them.

Banjo-Tooie was met with similar critical praise to that of its predecessor, though its bigger scale meant that some reviewers felt it could be a bit overwhelming at times. That said, the fact it was released a year after the collect-a-thon that was Donkey Kong 64 certainly went in the game's favour, because when you place it next to the elaborate epic that was the great ape's polygonal debut (which appears later in the book, naturally), Banjo-Tooie feels like sitting back and chilling out to an easy listening album by comparison. ■

BASSMASTERS 2000

Year	1999
Publisher	THQ
Developer	Mass Media Games

IF YOU'VE READ the NES, SNES or Mega Drive/Genesis Encyclopedias (in which case, thank you), you'll already know that the world of fishing was represented in video games with odd regularity throughout the '90s. The N64 only got two fishing games – in the west at least – and only one of these had the official Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.) licence. And brother/sister, you're looking at the fella. Bassmasters 2000 is based on The Bassmasters TV series, and lets players set sail on actual lakes from the Bassmaster Tournament Trail, including Old Hickory Lake in Tennessee, Lake Okeechobee in Florida and Shasta Lake in California. There's also a fictional area called Moorpark Lake where you can take part in a spot of 'speed fishing'. The B.A.S.S. licence isn't the only one you'll find here: this game is practically swimming in officially licensed equipment from Ranger boats, Mercury motors and MotorGuide trolling motors, to Hummingbird fish finders, Quantum rods and lines and lures from Rapala and Berkley. There's even commentary from fishing pros Roland Martin and Shaw Grigsby Jr, if that's the sort of thing that'll get your bait wiggling. One of the most unexpected highlights, however, comes in the form of Casting Game, a mini-game in which a series of targets are placed on the water and the player has to cast their rod to hit them within a certain time limit. For a game that has a slow pace by nature, this surprisingly frantic mode is a fun diversion. ■

FACT

The game usually came in a blue cartridge, but right near the end of the N64's run some standard grey cartridge versions were made too. This is considered the rarest 'variant' N64 cart, but you're still only talking about $100.

BATMAN BEYOND: RETURN OF THE JOKER

Year	2000
Publisher	Ubsioft
Developer	Kemco

WHEN IT COMES to superhero games, there are fewer more legendary characters to play than Bruce Wayne, part-time philanthropist and part-time human bat. That's an experience offered elsewhere, though, because Batman Beyond is set in the 2040s where Wayne is an old man whose idea of an epic struggle is getting up the stairs for bed. Instead, players control Terry McGinnis, a teenage vigilante who becomes Bruce's protégé and goes crime-fighting as Batman on his behalf. It's probably just as well too, because it appears that the Joker has made a comeback, but surely that can't be the case? Time to find out. Batman Beyond is a beat 'em up that takes place over five locations: the Gotham Air & Space Museum, Wayne Enterprises, Arkham Asylum, Tim Drake's laboratory and the Jolly Jack Candy Factory. As this shiny new Batman, players face off against a steady stream of enemies including members of the 'Jokerz' gang, mutated beast-men and security robots (the latter can be real pests). Batman can switch between four different suits as he fights, each with their own different abilities. The Offensive Suit gives him extra powerful attacks, the Defensive Suit lets him use a shield to block attacks and the Nimble Suit lets him jump over enemies, but it's his standard default suit that's perhaps the most entertaining because it lets him use a variety of gadgets like a staff, a discus and magnetic nunchucks. Ultimately, though, simply kicking everyone seems to do the trick most of the time. ■

FACT

The game is based on the animated movie of the same name. After the Columbine High School massacre the film was delayed and heavily edited (the Joker is electrocuted instead of shot, for example).

BATTLETANX

Year	1998
Publisher	The 3DO Company
Developer	The 3DO Company

IF YOU'RE LOOKING for a unique spin on your typical post-apocalyptic plot, you might want to try BattleTanx on for size. In the year 2001, a lethal virus called X2 appears out of nowhere. This particular virus only affects women, but it's extremely contagious, and 99 per cent of the entire world's female population dies as a result. The world's governments decide to round up the surviving women and keep them in secret, secure locations to keep humanity safe, but the worried male population don't take too kindly to this and chaos ensues. The male gangs 'rescue' all the women but it actually isn't all bad news: because they're so scarce and are essentially the key to continuing the human race, the women are now almost deified and each gang has their own 'QueenLord', the tribal ruler who the rest of the gang guard with their lives. As a 'warrior and battle leader' by the name of Griffin Spade, you've got a bit of a problem. You were due to get married to the love of your life, Madison, but after everything kicked off she was nabbed by a different gang and now you don't know where she is. It's up to you to try to find who has Madison as their QueenLord and try to get her back. Oh, and just to make sure you're well protected on your trip, you decide to head out in a ruddy big tank.

Griffin's quest starts off in a ruined New York City and takes him right across America, as he takes out numerous gangs and frees their

FACT

The Game Boy Color got its own version of BattleTanx. It was a top-down game that looked similar to Grand Theft Auto but wasn't very well received by critics.

QueenLords. There are three different types of tank to choose from, and each is very different: the MotoTank, for example, is your typical tiny, speedy number that's basically a modified motorcycle with tank treads. It's extremely fast and hard to hit but its armour is thinner than a book about bad Ben Affleck films (look, I like him). The M1A1 Abrams, meanwhile, is the BattleTanx equivalent of Mario in the Mario Kart games: an all-rounder that's perfectly competent in all areas – speed, weaponry, armour – but doesn't excel in any. Finally, the Goliath is a beast that's actually a tank mounted on a small rail platform. The tank can be detached from the platform to head out on its own, which would be quite adorable were it not for all the explosions. There's a wide variety of weaponry to use, ranging from grenades and guided missiles to Gun Buddies, little automated turrets that fire at enemies for you. If you don't really do subtlety you can also find and detonate nuclear bombs, which do enormous damage to everyone in the stage, yourself included. It's got a timer, you see, and the farther away you are the less damage you take, so it's very much a 'drop it and run' situation. 'Drop it and run' certainly wasn't the verdict among the gaming press, however: while review scores varied they were generally quite positive, and if you're a fan of vehicular combat games it still holds up today. ■

BATTLETANX: GLOBAL ASSAULT

Year 1999
Publisher The 3DO Company
Developer The 3DO Company

NEVER ONE TO shy away from a sequel – let's not forget the roughly 400 Army Men games – The 3DO Company decided to release a second BattleTanx game not long after the first one. Set a few years after the events of the previous game, Global Assault opens with Griffin and Madison, who are now married (and given how few women there are, I bet the priest bit their hand off to do the ceremony). Griffin now has his own tribe, established in San Francisco, and naturally Madison is the QueenLord. Even better, they've now got a young son called Brandon, but all is not as happy as it seems. An evil QueenLord called Cassandra wants to kidnap Brandon, and so another gun-heavy adventure kicks off, this time taking in both North American and European cities like London, Paris and Berlin. Whereas the first BattleTanx had three tanks to choose from, Global Assault ups the ante significantly, adding a further nine tanks to the existing three. These include the Rattler (which looks like a snake and can make sharp turns), the FLP-E (which can strafe sideways), the Inferno (which has a flamethrower) and the Rhino (which is pretty much invincible from the front but weak at the sides). Like its predecessor, it's also got a multiplayer mode for up to four players, which contains your typical options like Deathmatch and Tank Wars (which is just a team battle), but also slightly odder ones like BattleLord mode, which is basically Capture the Flag except instead of a flag it's a woman. ■

FACT

Global Assault was also released on the PlayStation but took a bit of a critical beating because the tanks moved much slower and the level design was considered far inferior.

BATTLEZONE: RISE OF THE BLACK DOGS

Year 2000
Publisher Crave Entertainment
Developer Climax Development

IN 1980, ATARI released Battlezone in arcades. With its vector graphics and first-person viewpoint it was a revolutionary moment in gaming. Rise of the Black Dogs may be an officially branded sequel to Battlezone, but it has very little to do with it beyond the presence of tanks. Rather than pure action, it's more of an action/strategy game where the player is both fighting enemies and making tactical decisions at the same time. It's set on the moon in the 1970s, in an alternate timeline in which both the US and Russia landed there and have now set up military bases. Playing as either the Americans or the Soviets (or a spin-off US unit called the Black Dogs), you have to carry out a series of missions to help establish dominance and make it clear to the Reds / Red, White & Blues that you guys are in charge of the moon. Players can drive their own armed vehicle around the moon's surface, taking out enemies and carrying out a variety of tasks. If things get a little too heated you can eject yourself out of your vehicle and run around: this makes you extremely vulnerable, so finding some replacement wheels is of utmost priority. At the same time as all this fighting, you also have to collect materials and use it to construct new buildings at your base, which in turn can build units you can command to either salvage more materials or act in a defensive capacity. ■

FACT

The game was originally released on PC in 1998 as just Battlezone. The third campaign based on the Black Dogs is exclusive to the N64, but the PC version had more varied multiplayer options.

BEETLE ADVENTURE RACING

Year 1999
Publisher Electronic Arts / Square EA
Developer Paradigm Entertainment / EA Canada

AFTER CO-DEVELOPING PILOTWINGS 64 and following that up with the F1 World Grand Prix series, Paradigm Entertainment teamed up with Electronic Arts for this fun licensed racing game based on the Volkswagen Beetle: specifically, the New Beetle model which had been introduced in 1997. Before the licence was secured the game had started off as a Nintendo 64 version of Need for Speed and it shows, because it handles quite similarly to 1998's Need for Speed III: Hot Pursuit. Naturally, though, it's a little cheerier than that series, with colourful cars and endearing track design. Players can take part in a single race or a Championship mode: the latter is your typical points-based competition where you take on a series of races and the higher you rank determines how many points you get. You can't scrape by with the occasional sloppy performance, though, because if you finish lower than fourth in a race you instantly get Game Over and have to start the Championship again from the beginning. There are six tracks in total, each with their own unique personalities. Coventry Cove, for example, is a charming English town in the countryside complete with castle ruins, while Inferno Isle has a suspiciously 'prehistoric park' style area, giant entrance gates and all, where a giant T-Rex leans over and tries to bite your car on every lap. Shortcuts in racing games are nothing new, but Beetle Adventure Racing puts heavy emphasis on the 'Adventure' part by filling its six courses to the brim with detours and alternative off-road routes. The first track alone is littered with all manner of tunnels, jumps, dirt paths and barns you can drive through in an attempt to not only save time but also collect the numbered boxes dotted around each course. These boxes contain bonus points and if you collect a set amount on a race you'll earn a Continue, while collecting all 100 points in a race will unlock a new arena in the game's multiplayer battle mode. There may not be a large number of tracks, then, but what's there is very much a case of quality over quantity. Not only is there the added challenge of trying to collect every points box, each circuit is also among the longest you'll find on N64. Your standard three-lap races can last anything up to seven or eight minutes to complete.

FACT

If you live in Australia you may be thinking this game looks familiar but don't remember the title. That's because it was known as HSV Adventure Racing there and used Holden VT cars instead.

Ultimately, its detailed tracks, its solid handling, the way it encourages players to explore the ins and outs of its environments and its generally cheery demeanour all combine to make Beetle Adventure Racing one of the most well-loved racing games on the system. The only real criticism that was directed at the game was something the developers couldn't really do anything about: because it was specifically based on New Beetle cars, the vehicle selection on offer was more than a little limited. Basically, if you didn't like Beetles then there weren't really many alternatives. Or, indeed, any. ■

BIG MOUNTAIN 2000

Year 1998
Publisher SouthPeak Interactive
Developer Imagineer

WHEN YOU'VE ALREADY got one of the greatest snowboarding games to date released on a console, it can almost seem like an impossible task to try and better it. That was the challenge facing Imagineer, but while Big Mountain 2000 doesn't quite surpass the achievements of 1080° Snowboarding, it still manages to deliver a solid snow-based racing experience. I say that instead of simply 'snowboarding game' because Big Mountain actually lets you choose between either a snowboard or skis, with each naturally handling in a different way. There are three main race types you encounter during the game's Championship mode: Free Ride is a straightforward race to the bottom (including an arcade-style timer just to keep you on your toes), Slalom has you weaving in and out of gates to keep your timer topped up (while still trying to finish first) and Giant Slalom is similar but the gates are farther apart, meaning you could run out of time if you miss just a couple of them. As you progress through the Championship you'll earn stat points that can be used to increase your Speed, Cornering, Damage, Acceleration and Cool stats (that last one affects how many stat points you get). While it may be just behind 1080° in terms of pure gameplay, then, there's certainly a degree of depth to Big Mountain that Nintendo's title doesn't offer, and anyone looking for a second helping of snowboarding (or, indeed, a first helping of skiing) may want to check it out. ■

FACT

The game wasn't called Big Mountain 2000 in Japan, probably because it was actually released in 1998 there. Instead, its original title was Snow Speeder, which is the name of the highest rank your character can reach.

BIO F.R.E.A.K.S.

Year 1998
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Saffire

SINCE MIDWAY HAD enjoyed success through much of the '90s with the Mortal Kombat series, it made sense that it would try to make lightning strike twice with a brand new fighting game that had nothing to do with its hugely popular brand. The result was Bio F.R.E.A.K.S., a polygonal fighter that tries to mix close-up hand-to-hand combat with long distance, weapons-based action. It's set in the future in Neo America, a collapsed nation whose 50 states are now broken into smaller territories run by giant tech corporations. To stop the worrying trend of these 'GI-Corps' ordering assassinations on other company members, a law is written up that all corporate arguments have to be settled by fights, with each corporation represented by their own Bio F.R.E.A.K.S. (Biological Flying Robotic Enhanced Armored Killing Synthoids). There are eight F.R.E.A.K.S. to choose from, ranging from soldier clone Bullzeye (the Ryu of the game) to a giant metallic minotaur called Minatek and the 'hyper-insane' Psyclown. Players have four close-combat attack buttons with each limb allocated a different C-button (similar to the way Tekken works), but the A button also lets them fire a long-range weapon, meaning battles can be played in two very different ways. Do enough damage to a specific part of an opponent's body and you can remove one of their limbs, rendering them completely 'armless. An easy joke, perhaps, but with a name like Bio F.R.E.A.K.S. being subtle would feel wrong. ■

FACT

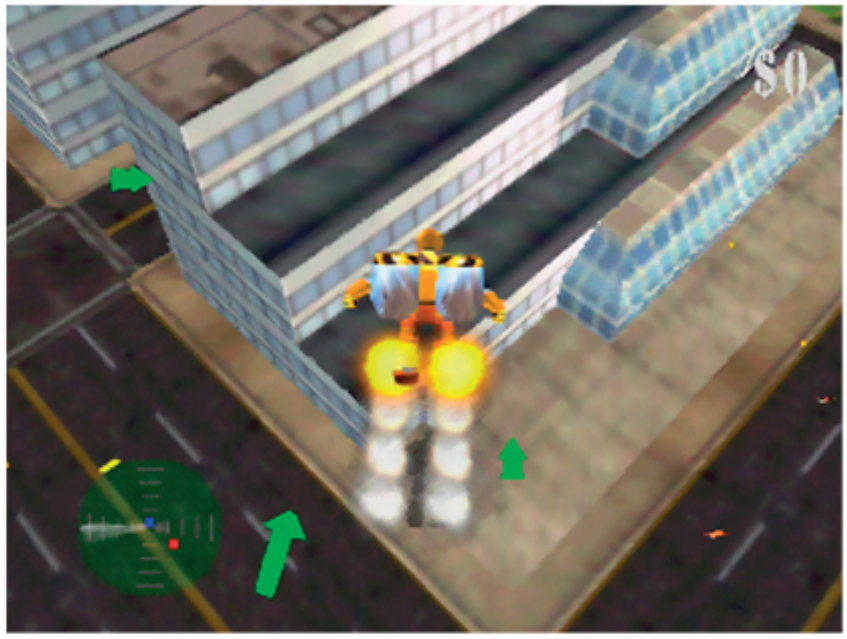
Bio F.R.E.A.K.S. was supposed to be an arcade game first and Midway even tested a prototype at a local arcade, but it was scrapped (presumably so it didn't clash with the recently released Mortal Kombat 4).

BLAST CORPS

Year	1997
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Rare

RARE HAD ALREADY enjoyed 15 years of success (including its initial stint as Ultimate Play the Game) by the time the Nintendo 64 launched, and had already been lauded for such gems as the Donkey Kong Country series, Battletoads and RC Pro-Am. However, it was the 11 games it released on the N64 – 10 completely original titles and one arcade port – that marked the pinnacle of the studio's accomplishments, and led to what was inarguably one of the most impressive five-year periods of any developer. After it opened with the arcade port (Killer Instinct Gold), Rare's first original title on the system and the real start of its winning streak was Blast Corps, a game about strategy, tension and mass destruction on an obscene scale.

The game's plot is refreshing in its simplicity. A pair of defective nuclear missiles are making their way to a safe detonation site when one of them starts to leak. The automated truck carrying them decides to take the most direct route to its destination, which just happens to be right through a bunch of buildings and other obstacles. The slightest dent to the missiles will cause them to detonate and create an enormous nuclear explosion, so it's up to the Blast Corps to clear a path for the truck so it can reach its destination safely. In an ideal world that should be done with controlled explosions, but with the imminent arrival of a ruddy big truck carrying some leaky bombs, the only possible solution is uncontrolled chaos instead. The Blast Corps have access to a selection of special vehicles which have the ability to bring down buildings, but the twist is that each one does so in a different manner.



FACT

Blast Corps went through a bunch of different working titles, including Bull, Heavy Duty, Heavy Metal, Blast Radius, Power Dozer and Blastdozer. It kept the Blastdozer name in Japan.

The Ramdozer is a specially reinforced bulldozer that's probably the most straightforward of the bunch: you simply drive it into buildings as fast as you can to do the most damage. The Backlash, however, is a dump truck whose strong point is actually the dumper section at the back, so driving head-on into buildings does next to nothing. Instead, you'll have to approach them at speed then pull off a huge powerslide so the rear end of the truck swings around and smacks into them. Ten there's Skyfall (a buggy which leaps off ramps and lands on things), Sideswipe (a truck with two pneumatic arms that 'punch' out to the sides) and Ballista (a motorbike that fires missiles because sometimes simplicity is the best policy). And that's not to mention the various mech suits you can also find, each with their own abilities (tumbling into buildings, Dragon Punching them into oblivion, even using a jetpack to fly up and stomp downwards through them). So why not just pick the one with the missiles every time? Well, because each stage gives you specific vehicles, meaning you'll need to master all of them. Crucially, you'll actually want to, because Blast Corps perfectly straddles the balance between making its missions difficult but ensuring you still have that 'one more go' mindset regardless. ■

BLUES BROTHERS 2000

Year	2000
Publisher	Titus Software
Developer	Player 1

GOLDENEYE 007 WAS one of those great rare examples of a movie tie-in that was actually brilliant. Some put this down to the fact that the game was released long after the film was, rather than developers Rare having to frantically work to a tight deadline to get it ready in time for the movie hitting cinemas. On paper, then, Blues Brothers 2000 should enjoy a similar level of quality, given that the film was released in 1998 but the game didn't hit shelves until 2000 (which was more appropriate, when you think about it). In reality, of course, Blues Brothers 2000 is rarely if ever regarded as highly as GoldenEye is, but that's not to say it was completely without merit.

The game revolves around control of Elwood J. Blues, played in the movie by Dan Aykroyd, and opens with him in prison following the events of the first Blues Brothers movie. Elwood's mission is to break out of prison and find the other three members of his band, so they can reunite and enter a Battle of the Bands contest run by a 130-year-old cannibal voodoo witch called Queen Moussette (and to think some people said the police car chase in the first film was a bit far-fetched). There are four stages in total, and players have to collect 10 hidden musical notes in each stage before they can progress to the next.

After battling guards, inmates and a sadistic nurse in prison, Elwood then travels to the streets of Chicago, where he explores alleyways, parks and sewers while fighting cops, Russian mobsters and general members of the public (it turns out people in this game really don't like Dan Aykroyd for some reason). Then it's off to a cemetery to rescue 10-year-old orphan Buster from an evil tree, before finally making your way through a swamp to reach Queen Moussette's mansion.

FACT

The *Blues Brothers 2000* movie was considered something of a failure. Its budget was $30 million but it only grossed around $14 million at the box office.

A game based on a movie that revolves around music would naturally need to have a soundtrack of note, and Blues Brothers 2000 does its best despite the storage limitations of the cartridge format. Rather than going with heavily compressed versions of real music, the game instead features a selection of N64-ised instrumental covers of actual songs like Respect by Otis Redding, Born in Chicago by Nick Gravenites, Cheaper to Keep Her by Mack Rice, Maybe I'm Wrong by John Popper and 634-5789 by Eddie Floyd. To further drive the point home, Elwood occasionally engages in a rhythm-based mini-game where the player has to repeat button combinations (the game's weakest point). Although Blues Brothers 2000 is generally forgotten these days and wasn't even that well received at the time, there were much worse 3D platformers in that era, and while it doesn't do anything particularly remarkable, nor does it commit any egregious gaming sins. It may not be 'on a mission from God', then, but at least the attempt was made in good faith. ■

BODY HARVEST

Year	1998
Publisher	Gremlin Interactive / Midway
Developer	DMA Design

BEFORE IT GAINED worldwide flame and notoriety under the name Rockstar North, the Scottish studio best known these days for the Grand Theft Auto games went by the name DMA Design. After finding huge success with Lemmings the studio created Unirally for the SNES, which did well enough that Nintendo agreed it would publish DMA's first Nintendo 64 game. The game would become Body Harvest, and Nintendo would become nervous of its violence, so it ultimately stepped away from the deal, leading Gremlin and Midway to step in and take over.

The game is set in an alternate timeline, where giant alien bugs have been invading the Earth every 25 years since 1916. Each time they attack they choose a specific part of the world, create an enormous blue shield around it (so nobody can either escape or enter to help out), then 'harvest' every human in that area, collecting their genetic material to make more aliens from it. This is probably why Nintendo got a bit wary, in hindsight. By the year 2016, the aliens are ready for one last attack to destroy the human race, but not if Adam Drake has anything to say about it. Based on Station Omega, a space station orbiting the Earth, his mission is clear: use a time-travelling ship called Alpha I to travel back to each alien invasion and stop it happening, thereby rewriting history and creating a timeline where billions of humans weren't harvested. Obviously there are Terminator-style plot holes here – if he manages to create a good future, then surely he would no longer need to go back in time – but let's not worry about that.

FACT

The name DMA was taken from Amiga programming manuals, which referred to Direct Memory Access. Co-founder Dave Jones got bored with journalists asking what it stood for, so he started telling them it was Doesn't Mean Anything.

As you play through each of the invasion sites – Greece in 1916, Java in 1941, the US in 1966 and Siberia in 1991, followed by a final battle on an alien comet in 2016 – you encounter all manner of alien types to gun down, from giant spiders called Harvesters which can spawn more enemies, to giant Mantasaurs (huge creatures with guns for long range attacks and mantis arms for really close attacks) and slimy jellies that suck people up and carry them to other aliens for ingestion. The aim is to not only kill all the aliens but also to prevent humans being harvested. If six humans are eaten, the aliens will create a Mutant, an extremely powerful creature that can crush you with a single giant leap.

In something of an early taste of what would eventually come in the Grand Theft Auto games, Adam can not only freely run around each stage, but can also jump in and out of any vehicles he can find to help him get around quicker. There's a wide range of vehicles, true to each time period, from cars and trucks to fire engines, taxis, motorbikes, tanks, planes, helicopters and boats. These add variety to what could have otherwise been a mindless blasting game and ensure Body Harvest remains entertaining to this day. ■

BOMBERMAN 64

Year 1997
Publisher Nintendo / Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

A GAMES CONSOLE may as well be null and void if it doesn't have a Bomberman game on it: apologies, Magnavox Odyssey fans. The Nintendo 64 had a few of them, starting with Bomberman 64, but it's fair to say this game (and its sequel) didn't follow the typical conventions of the series. It's set on Planet Bomber, a world that's usually surprisingly peaceful given its citizens' propensity for using explosives. One day an enormous spaceship appears out of nowhere, looking to cause some aggro. The ship belongs to a chap called Altair (not the Assassin's Creed hero), who's managed to get hold of the Omni Cube, an immensely powerful gizmo that can absorb energy from the universe and transfer it to its owner. Bomberman watches on helplessly as Altair and his baddies attack the planet, but suddenly a mysterious warrior called Sirius appears and offers to help Bomberman on his quest to save the day. Cue antics! Whereas previous games in the Bomberman series were played on grid-like stages, Bomberman 64 tries something different by placing our hero in a series of open environments and allowing him to move freely in all directions. Because of this, the style of his bombs' explosions has also changed. Rather than the traditional Bomberman blasts where detonated bombs send flaming trails in straight lines up, down and to the sides, here the bombs have a more realistic circular blast radius. Although the game is technically a platformer in that its stages aren't just flat environments and have raised sections too, Bomberman can't actually jump. Instead, he has to use a special bomb jump move in which he drops bombs in gaps in front of him, then bounces off them to reach otherwise inaccessible platforms. The game opens with four different worlds that the player can choose to explore in any order they wish: Green Garden, Blue Resort, Red Mountain and White Glacier. Only once all four of these stages are beaten can you then head to Black Fortress, the final stage where you finally get to take on Altair. Each world also has 20 hidden golden tickets, and collecting all 100 of them will unlock the sixth and final hidden stage, Rainbow Palace, where the true villain is revealed.

FACT

Bomberman's facial features aren't actually attached to his head, they're sprites positioned right in front of it. On rare occasions (like when he beats a boss) he stands at a certain angle that shows them floating.

While the single-player mode in Bomberman 64 could therefore be considered more in-depth and involved than in previous Bomberman games, the multiplayer mode – which is usually the most popular element of each entry, and supports up to four players this time – was also completely overhauled, albeit in a way that was met with generally less enthusiasm by critics and fans alike. Once again the grid-based stages were ditched in favour of open environments, meaning multiplayer feels very different to that of previous games in the series. That didn't necessarily mean it was bad by any means: you only need to look for footage of the multiplayer mode on YouTube to find countless comments from people saying they loved playing it as a child back in the day. ■

BOMBERMAN 64: THE SECOND ATTACK

Year 1999
Publisher Vatical Entertainment / Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

ON HIS WAY home from defeating Altair in the first game and congratulating himself on a job well done, Bomberman finds himself in a spot of bother when his ship is sucked into a giant black hole that he's fairly sure wasn't there before. It turns out it's the work of Rukifellth, the 'Dark Messenger', who is using the black hole to capture planets – including Planet Bomber – so he can find and collect eight elemental crystals and take over the universe. Time to find those crystals and make sure Rukifellth doesn't get his hands on them. This time Bomberman is accompanied by a little blob-like animal called Pommy which definitely isn't anything like Kirby, honest, and is controlled either by the CPU or a second player. Pommy can fight enemies on Bomberman's behalf and along the way you can find food for him which makes him evolve (different foods lead to different evolutions). Whereas The Second Attack follows on from its predecessor by once again featuring open stages with movement in all directions, this sequel does at least revert back to tradition in one way by ditching the circular blast radius and going back to the good old '+' shaped bomb blasts fans of the series were more used to. This extends to the multiplayer mode too, and while it does still include a number of open battle stages, some grid-like arenas also make a return to ensure it's possible to play some 'proper' 4-player Bomberman the way most players knew and loved it. ■

FACT

Pommy re-appeared in a handful of other Bomberman games but he barely spoke in them. That certainly isn't the case here, where he won't shut up in some cut-scenes.

BOMBERMAN HERO

Year 1998
Publisher Nintendo / Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

NESTLED NEATLY IN between the releases of both Bomberman 64 games was Bomberman Hero, a standalone single-player adventure that felt more like a traditional platform game than any other Bomberman title. The premise is as close to *Star Wars* as you can probably get without legal action: Bomberman encounters a crashed spaceship containing a robot inside it. The robot belongs to Princess Millian from the planet Primus Star, who was trying to steal a data disk from the evil Garaden Empire. When she was captured by the Empire and their leader Bagular, the robot managed to escape. It's up to Luk… um, Bomberman to leave his home planet and rescue the Princess. Bomberman Hero plays so differently to the other games in the series it may as well be considered a completely separate game that just happens to star Bomberman. As it's more of a platform game the player can actually jump this time, and the actual act of dropping bombs is rarely needed: instead, you spend most of your time lobbing bombs like projectiles instead. Along the way you'll also find Power Gear, four items that give Bomberman new abilities. There's the Bomber Copter, the Bomber Slider, the Bomber Jet and the Bomber Marine, which are a helicopter rotor, a snowboard, a jetpack and a submarine rotor respectively. Players can also ride Louies, the kangaroo-like chums seen in other Bomberman games. As for the multiplayer mode? Um… well, there isn't one, which is rare for a series best known for multiplayer fun. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Bomberman Hero is significantly easier than the western one, with weaker enemies, more 1-Ups and hearts, and easier requirements to clear each stage.

BOTTOM OF THE 9TH

Year 1999
Publisher Konami
Developer KCE Chicago

THE ORIGINAL BOTTOM of the Ninth was a 1989 arcade take on baseball. This polygonal take release ten years later doesn't really have much in common with it, other than the sport it's based on of course. It doesn't even write 'Ninth' the same way. As with many American sports games of the '90s, Bottom of the 9th is one of those titles that only secured one of the two major licences needed for authenticity in each sport: the league licence and the player licence. In this case, Konami went for the latter, securing a full MLBPA licence to get more than 750 real-life players in the game, some of whom even received full polygonal recreations. The lack of an MLB licence, though, means you're playing as Toronto and New York instead of the Blue Jays and Yankees. As well as your typical Exhibition and Season modes based on the 1998 season, there's also a Scenario mode similar to that seen in Konami's International Superstar Soccer games. There are 20 scenarios to choose from, all based on recent moments in real-life games, and it's up to you to win each of them. For example, the first scenario has Anaheim and Boston tying at 5-5 at the top of the 8th, with Mo Vaughn (who had just left Boston) stepping up to the plate to show his former team they shouldn't have let him go. Ooooft, I can feel the tension already, and I'm just sitting here typing the thing out. ■

FACT

Forgive me, American readers, but for the benefit of others who may not be familiar with baseball, 'Bottom of the 9th' refers to the second half of the final inning, meaning it's the last chance a losing team has to grab a last-minute win.

BRUNSWICK CIRCUIT PRO BOWLING

Year 1999
Publisher THQ
Developer Point of View

THERE HAVE BEEN plenty of bowling games over the years, but very few have taken the sport as seriously as Brunswick Circuit Pro Bowling, which goes more in-depth than any other offering before it, and most of those that have followed since. Players can either create their own bowler or choose from one of 13 real-life members of the 'Brunswick Pro Staff', top bowlers sponsored by Brunswick including the likes of Walter Ray Williams Jr, Johnny Petraglia and Parker Bohn III (who also wins my award for Best Name, incidentally). If you want you can play a single exhibition game, or enter a tournament to make things a little more interesting. Alternatively, you can choose the lengthy Career mode, which has you entering tournaments at 15 different locations all around the world from Reno, Nevada and Bergenfield, New Jersey to the likes of Munich and Tokyo. These aren't just the same alleys with the name changed either: each has a different oil pattern, meaning the ball will spin on them differently, and as such you'll need to select carefully from your choice of six actual Brunswick balls. Told you it was serious business. If the enormity of the experience starts to feel a bit overbearing and you need to relax before the world of bowling consumes you, there's also the option to play Cosmic Bowling, which is basically the same as normal bowling except you're playing on a neon alley with glowing balls. In Las Vegas, naturally. ■

FACT

A PlayStation sequel released in 2000 managed to get even more detailed by introducing pro women's bowlers to the mix too.

BUCK BUMBLE

Year	1998
Publisher	Ubisoft
Developer	Argonaut Software

BUCK BUMBLE IS known among some internet meme circles as the game with one of the best title screen themes of all time, but while its speed garage soundtrack is indeed a joy to behold, the only Nintendo 64 game created by the UK studio involved with the SuperFX chip and the original Star Fox should be remembered for more than just that.

The game is set in the year 2010, and as far as Earth's citizens are concerned everything seems to be in order. What they don't realise, however, is that a dangerous chemical spill that took place in London many years ago led to some insects being contaminated, and over time they've evolved until they've reached their current state, where they're actually able to create and use powerful weapons. These mutated insects call themselves The Horde and now plan to take over the rest of the insect race and, following that, conquer the entire world, so while the humans are none the wiser they're certainly in for a rude awakening soon unless something is done about it. That something is Buck Bumble, a volunteer military bumblebee who has been genetically enhanced and fitted with cyborg implants to make him the ultimate fighting machine. It's up to Buck to reclaim the insects' lost land and take the sting out of The Horde's attack before anyone else can think of any more insect puns.

The game is a third-person shooter where players control Buck over the course of 19

missions. While Argonaut had previously enjoyed success by working with Nintendo on Star Fox, the on-rails nature of that game is ditched here in favour of a more free-roaming approach, as players can travel in any direction they wish as they gun down The Horde's soldiers: ants, crane flies, wasps, dragonflies and the like. There are some mean customers here (a caterpillar with twin plasma cannons mounted on it, anyone?) so luckily Buck can also collect a bunch of weapons, ranging from his standard pistol to a laser gun, lightning gun and even a special missile launcher that lets you pilot the missile yourself.

As well as its main single-player adventure, Buck Bumble also has a pair of two-player modes. The first of these is Buck Battle, which is a straightforward one-on-one dogfighting contest where the aim is naturally to gun down your opponent before they can take you out. It's the second mode that garnered the most headlines, however, as Buzz Ball sees players trying to guide a full-sized football into their opponent's net by firing weapons at it (and of course attacking their opponent to take them out of action).

Someone at Ubisoft clearly loved Rumble Paks because not one, but two special third-party Buck Bumble peripherals were released. The Shock Pack was made by Guillemot and was basically a yellow Rumble Pak, while the Buck Bumble Pack (which was exclusive to UK stores Dixons and Currys) was produced by Joy Tech and had a yellow and black striped pattern. ■

FACT

If you plan on playing Buck Bumble, use an original controller. Some modern N64 controllers like the Brawler 64 don't work well because the game reads their maximum stick input as zero, meaning if you fully push the Control Stick, Buck won't move.

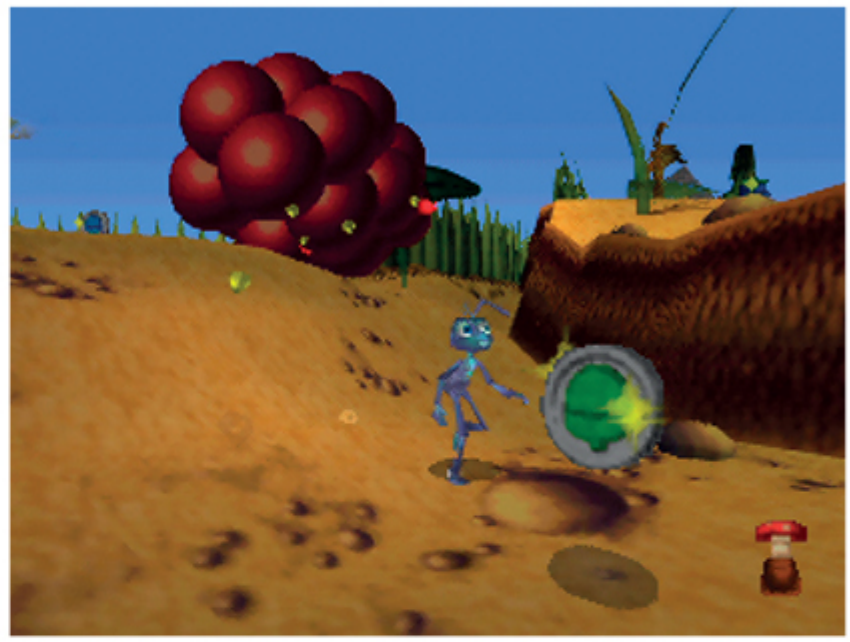
A BUG'S LIFE

Year	1999
Publisher	Activision
Developer	Traveller's Tales

OF ALL THE Pixar movies released to date, *A Bug's Life* is easily one of the most unfairly underappreciated. But hey, that's for another book: all that matters here is that at the time, Pixar's second film was popular enough to get its own Nintendo 64 game, and while it's a fairly straightforward platformer for the most part, it does have one or two interesting mechanics that at least tried to bring something different to the table. Something that could be considered 'anty-traditional', if you will (I'm so sorry).

For the most part the game retells the plot of the movie, with our heroic ant Flik heading off to find bigger bugs in the hope that he can enlist their help in defending his colony from an imminent grasshopper attack. It's made up of 15 stages, divided into five main acts that follow the film's main beats: Flik messing around in his home island, his journey across the dried-up river bottom after leaving the island, his trek through a city in search of new friends, his return to the island and the final war against the grasshoppers.

Flik can attack enemies in two different ways. He can either throw berries at them (which is frankly degrading), or he can perform a ground pound type move by pressing the jump button twice. The main gimmick, though, revolves around the numerous seeds that can be found dotted around each stage. At first, all the seeds you find are innocuous brown ones, and if you ground pound them they'll turn into mushrooms that Flik can use to bounce to higher areas.



Throughout the stage, however, Flik can also find special seed tokens, which come in a variety of colours. You can use these tokens to change the colour of a seed, which also affects what it turns into when you ground pound it. For example, if you find a green token you can grow a plant with a large leaf that can act as a platform, while a blue token gives Flik a power-up like invincibility, extra health or a shield. Purple tokens power up Flik's berry attack, while yellow ones give Flik a gun that fires berries at a faster, deadlier rate. On top of this, players can use multiple tokens of the same colour to turn the seed into something even more effective. Use a bunch of green tokens, for example, and the plant that grows will have a number of leaves, giving Flik more than just one platform. Even the standard brown seed can be enhanced with brown tokens, turning the typical bouncy mushroom into a propeller plant, a dandelion or a cannon plant, each flinging Flik progressively higher into the air.

FACT

In the film, Roddy McDowall played Mr Soil, a member of the ant council. This was his last film role before he passed away, but he also voiced Mr Soil in the game's tutorial, meaning the game was actually his final work in general.

A Bug's Life didn't exactly blow critics away, with many declaring it typical of the standard of most movie tie-ins at the time. Its attempt to at least try something different with the seed system, however, at least warrants some recognition. Just like the film itself does these days, I suppose. ■

BUST-A-MOVE 2 ARCADE EDITION

Year 1998
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Probe Entertainment

THE BUST-A-MOVE GAMES serve as one of those rare examples of a spin-off eventually becoming more popular than the actual series it was based on. The first game was originally planned to be a simple puzzle-based offshoot of the Bubble Bobble series (hence its Japanese name, Puzzle Bobble), but over the years as Bubble Bobble's popularity waned Bust-a-Move grew from strength to strength: if you haven't played it, chances are you've played or seen one of its many modern mobile game imitations. Bust-a-Move has players firing coloured bubbles at other bubbles on the screen, in an attempt to make three of the same colour touch. Doing this makes them disappear, potentially making more bubbles drop off the screen if they were attached to them. As the name suggests, Bust-a-Move 2 is based on the arcade game of the same name and includes the three main modes that featured in that version. Puzzle mode has you taking on a series of preset stages where the aim is simply to clear all the bubbles on-screen, whereas 1P vs CPU and Player vs Player modes are head-to-head contests in which your goal is to drive your opponents' bubbles to the bottom of their screen by clearing your own and sending over pesky ghost bubbles. Exclusive to the home version is a Time Attack mode, which plays similarly to the Puzzle mode but has players trying to clear stages as quickly as possible to set their best time. Few games mix puzzling and skill as well as the Bust-a-Move games do. ■

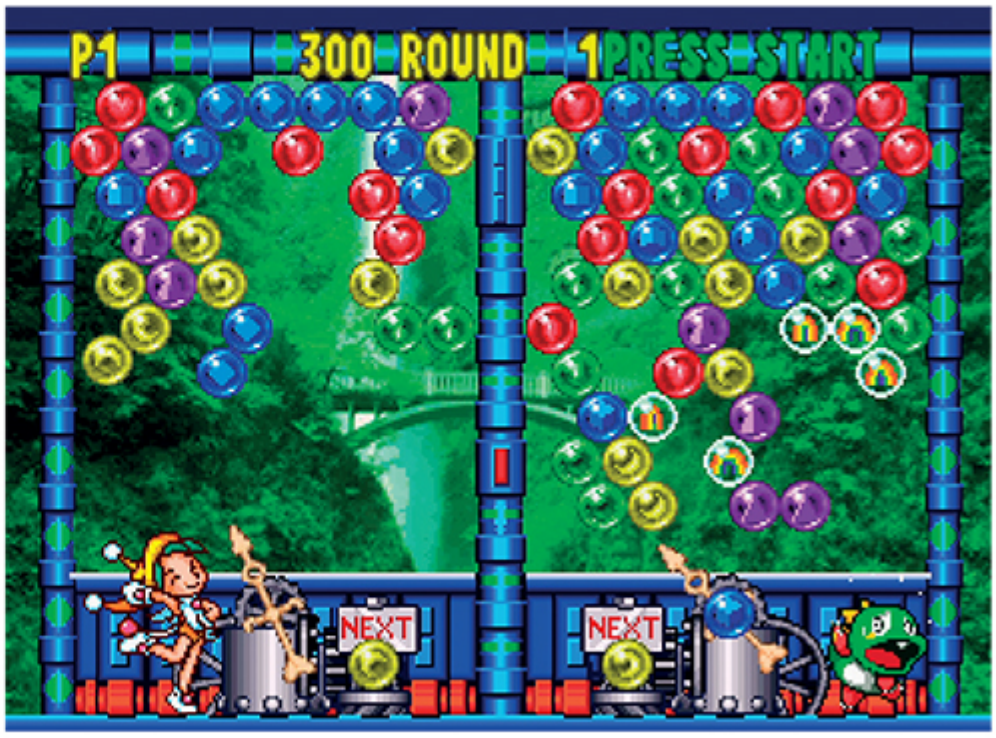
FACT

The North American version of the arcade game is significantly different to the Japanese one, because Bubble Bobble heroes Bub and Bob aren't even in it. Luckily they were put back in by the time the game reached consoles.

BUST-A-MOVE '99

Year 1998
Publisher Acclaim / Taito
Developer Distinctive Developments

SOMEONE AT ACCLAIM must have thought that Bust-a-Move was going to be its next annual series like it was some sort of sports game. That's the only logical explanation for the game known in Japan as Puzzle Bobble 3 and in Europe as Bust-a-Move 3 DX to instead be given the yearly-themed title Bust-a-Move '99 in North America. While its core concept is more or less identical to that of its predecessor, this threequel adds a bunch of extra features designed to keep players engaged for longer. The arcade version of the game (with its Puzzle and Vs modes) is back, but this time joining it are a new four-player multiplayer mode, a Challenge mode (where you're given certain conditions for clearing each round and are then ranked), a Win Contest mode (where you play each of the game's characters one by one) and a Collection mode, which features an impressive 1025 puzzles created by Bust-a-Move fans. This time, instead of simply playing as Bub and Bob, players now have eight different characters to choose from, each with their own different special 'bubble attack' move in multiplayer. And when you're bored with all that, the Edit mode lets you create up to 25 of your own stages from scratch and save them to a Controller Pak so you can take them to your friend's house and watch forlornly as they inevitably plough through them without breaking a sweat. Look, there's only so many ways you can arrange a load of balls on a screen. ■



FACT

If you enter your name as SEX in the high score table the game changes it to PB3. Nice try.

CALIFORNIA SPEED

Year	1999
Publisher	Midway
Developer	Midway Games

ORIGINALLY RELEASED IN arcades in 1998, California Speed was the latest in a run of Midway racing games that included the Cruis'n series. While at first glance it appears to be another straightforward arcade racer set in and around California, it does introduce one somewhat off-the-wall difference in that many of its tracks start off 'normal' and eventually introduce something far less conventional to race through. Take the Silicon Valley course, for example, which starts off like the typical sort of countryside track you get in many racing games, but ends up chucking players inside a giant computer, racing past actual silicon as you dodge microchips and the like. Meanwhile, the Santa Cruz stage takes you through the city and its boardwalk before diverting you onto the tracks of the Giant Dipper, its historic wooden rollercoaster. This essentially becomes the game's central theme: whether it's ploughing through the Great Mall of the Bay Area (known as the Great Big Mall here), making a shortcut through a giant UFO in the Mojave Desert, racing through the Monterey Aquarium or literally driving over the top of the Golden Gate Bridge, it's clear that the theme here is over-the-top, unrealistic racing action, with the result being that each of the initial 11 tracks are entertainingly off-beat even by typical arcade game standards.

There are also 11 vehicles to choose from at first, ranging from the sort of race

cars you'd expect from a game like this – a sportster, a muscle car, a Ferrari knock-off – to quirkier things like a golf cart, a bulldozer, a forklift, a camper van and an 'Insect' (i.e. a Beetle). There's also an old '50s style Chevy truck in there but because there are no licences it instead has the charming name Ol' Truck. Naturally, the Nintendo 64 version of the game loses some visual quality compared to the arcade title, and there are some tweaks that you would expect from a Nintendo game of the time – the mall is empty in the N64 port, rather than full of people you can run over in the arcades – but the racing is where it counts and in that respect the game certainly has its fans.

FACT

The arcade version had three stages that were cut from the N64 game (Laguna Seca, Willow Springs and Sears Point), but the N64 version has five exclusive unlockable tracks (Clover, Oval, Fuji, San Andreas and California).

California Speed is also responsible for one of the strangest Easter eggs in gaming history, and it was a completely accidental one. Deep in the middle of an extreme crunch period, the game's development team were asked to remove some of the in-game billboards for arcade titles, and replace them with billboards better suited to console gaming. Texture artist Morgan Godat, in his frustration, added a placeholder image that said: 'SoMETIMES God TaKes MOMMIES aNd PuPPIES AWAY… And SoMETIMES… Just SoMETIMES… I do.' Godat assumed it would be clear this was a placeholder and would eventually be replaced by someone else in the team later. Guess what happened (or rather, didn't happen). In 2014 a screenshot of the billboard ended up on Reddit, meaning it was a full 16 years before Godat realised his placeholder hadn't been removed after all. Whoops. ■

CARMAGEDDON 64

Year	1999
Publisher	Titus Software / Sales Curve Interactive
Developer	Software Creations

NINTENDO MAY HAVE lightened up a bit regarding censorship by the time it had reached the Nintendo 64 era, but it still wasn't completely averse to preventing some things from appearing on its system (see the previous page with California Speed's empty malls). Carmageddon was another game that fell foul of Nintendo's axe, though this was perhaps inevitable given the significant controversy the series had already gathered since its original release on PC two years prior. The first game was censored in some countries (like Germany) and outright banned in others (including Brazil), mainly because a significant part of its gameplay involved driving over pedestrians, who would explode in showers of blood. Naturally, such schlock wouldn't fly on a Nintendo system and so, as had been the case with previous censored versions of the game, the humans were replaced with moaning and shuffling zombies with green goo instead of red blood.

Despite the title, Carmageddon 64 is actually a port of Carmageddon II: Carpocalypse Now rather than the original game. It's set in the year 2026 and, to fit in with the zombie theme, takes place after 'unnaturally high solar activity' has toxified the Earth's atmosphere and zombified anyone exposed by it. Discovering that underground racers in Old Detroit have been holding illegal street races and happily running over any zombies dumb enough to stumble onto the track, the government – realising this is a perfect way to solve the undead problem – decides to hold an official event called Carmageddon, where the aim is to 'drive to survive' and the winner gets to leave the colonies and live on a beach.

FACT

N64 Magazine's Tim Weaver (now a multi-million selling author) certainly wasn't keen on this game, scoring it a mere 8 per cent and telling readers to take it off shop shelves and throw the cartridge off the wall until it breaks.

There are a total of 40 races and missions to play through, with the races taking up the vast majority. Although for the most part there are no rules, races still have to be won somehow, and in this case there are three different ways to pull this off. The most conventional method is by simply driving around the track, passing through each of the checkpoints until you've completed a set number of laps before your timer runs out. Alternatively, you can try to destroy all the other cars you're competing against: once you're the only one left, you'll win the race. Finally, the most entertaining method (but also the most difficult) involves hunting down and running over all the zombies on a single stage: since some of these are hidden and in hard to reach locations, this can be quite tricky. Ultimately, the most practical solution ends up being a combination of the three, because unless you're an expert – and the game's slippery handling doesn't really allow for much expertise – you probably won't have enough time to finish all the checkpoints, but destroying enemies and running over zombies tops up your timer. The best strategy, then, is to head for the checkpoints but cause as much carnage as you can along the way. Which I suppose is why it's called Carmageddon and not Living in Carmony. ■

CASTLEVANIA

Year	1999
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEK

ALTHOUGH THE CASTLEVANIA series had made appearances on numerous non-Nintendo systems throughout the '80s and '90s including the Mega Drive and PC Engine, it's fair to say the series was most synonymous with Nintendo consoles, mainly thanks to the iconic initial trilogy on the NES and Super Castlevania IV on the SNES. All eyes were on Konami, then, to see what it could pull off when it decided to make the jump to polygons, and the result was an interesting game that felt like its own unique thing rather than a natural progression of the main series.

Castlevania (which was originally planned to be called Castlevania 64) is set in Transylvania in 1852 where, after a hundred years of sleeping, Count Dracula has risen once again. Sensing that the big man has woken up and is probably not feeling so chipper after such a long nap, two heroes head out to try to find him so they can put him back to sleep again, and for good this time. Safe to say, the stakes are high (sorry). Players can choose between two different characters: Reinhardt Schneider, the heir to the legendary Belmont clan of vampire hunters, and Carrie Fernandez, a witch who became an orphan after Dracula and his followers wiped out her clan when she was a child.

Reinhardt plays more like you would expect a Castlevania game to play: he's armed with the iconic Vampire Killer whip (which can be powered up, as always) and can also find various secondary weapons like holy water, axes, throwing knives and cross-shaped boomerangs to help him on his adventure. Carrie, meanwhile, also has access to these secondary items but rather than using a whip, her main weapon of choice is the ability to use magic to fire energy bullets at enemies. This move can be charged, so you can either tap the B button to fire a small glowing bullet or hold it down to unleash a more powerful blast.

FACT

Reinhardt was originally going to be called Reinhardt Belmont, to make his bloodline more obvious. The change of surname allowed for a backstory in which he suffered from self-doubt about whether he was truly part of the clan.

Regardless of which character you choose, the game plays similarly, with smaller enemies regularly spawning to make life tricky for you and the occasional big boss fight popping up to keep things interesting. There's also a fair amount of platforming gameplay thrown in for good measure, and it's here where Castlevania 64 has probably aged the most. Its notorious camera (which can't be manually rotated) is often positioned in awkward directions, meaning it can be a tad frustrating constantly tapping R to bring the camera at least somewhat behind you to line up jumps. This is particularly precarious when you consider that falling into certain hazards (such as, say, a knee-high river) will kill you instantly and force you start all over again from the beginning of the last section. Despite these frustrations Castlevania was an interesting attempt at breathing new life into Konami's series, and while it may not have aged as well as the 2D Castlevania titles, it was still a curious spin-off for fans of the series to further explore the games' complicated lore. ■

CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS

Year	1999
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEK

JUST 11 MONTHS after releasing its N64 take on Castlevania, Konami decided to dive back into it with Legacy of Darkness, an odd game that's part prequel, part director's cut of its predecessor. Set eight years before the events of the first N64 game, it instead has you playing as Cornell, a slender chap with long fingernails who returns to his village to find it burnt down and his sister Ada missing (she's going to be used as a sacrifice to resurrect Dracula, you see). Off heads Cornell to save her, but he's packing a secret: he's actually a man-beast, capable of turning into a werewolf for a limited time and gaining extra power and speed as a result. The thing is, because Cornell is heading to Dracula's castle to save Ada, this means he finds himself visiting most of the same areas seen in the first N64 Castlevania, albeit eight years earlier. Although the game is technically a prequel, Konami marketed it as a Special Edition: indeed, many of the stages offer similar boss fights and other similarities that were it a modern release Konami would have probably just added Cornell as a DLC character with a special 'rearranged' campaign. It's easy to be cynical and say Konami was just calling it a Special Edition as an excuse to punt out the same game with a few tweaks but, to its credit, Cornell was actually supposed to be the original game's hero, as seen in early screenshots when it was first announced. ■

FACT

In 2002, Konami reworked the Castlevania timeline and removed both Nintendo 64 games (and a few others), making them part of an 'alternate continuity'. So technically, neither of them actually happened.

CENTRE COURT TENNIS

Year	1998
Publisher	Hudson Soft / Gaga Interactive
Developer	Hudson Soft

SIT DOWN, BECAUSE I've got some news that might put you on your backside if you aren't careful. Centre Court Tennis is a tennis game. I know, it surprised me too. Sarcasm aside, it's a reasonably well polished game where players can choose from a variety of preset players (none of whom are based on real people) or create their own from scratch before taking part in one of four tournaments: the United Kingdom Open, Île-de-France Open, North American Open and Oceania Open. As well as standard tennis there's also a handful of mini-games including Knock 'em Down (where you have to knock over a stack of blocks with a head on top), Burning Barrels (where you have to lob balls at a set of oil drums), Run and Gun (where you volley back a series of balls while ignoring the bombs randomly fired at you) and Tennis Court Bingo (where you lob balls onto cards lying on the other side of the court to flip them over). There's also an interesting Challenge mode, where players face off on a rather charming court decorated with lace, which has a sort of turntable in the middle. Every now and then, a gentle music box style melody plays and the turntable rotates, moving the players with it, making it harder to run around. Add to this the ability to wager your clothing – not in a dodgy way, just to acquire new gear from opponents – and there's a reasonable degree of depth to this one. ■

FACT

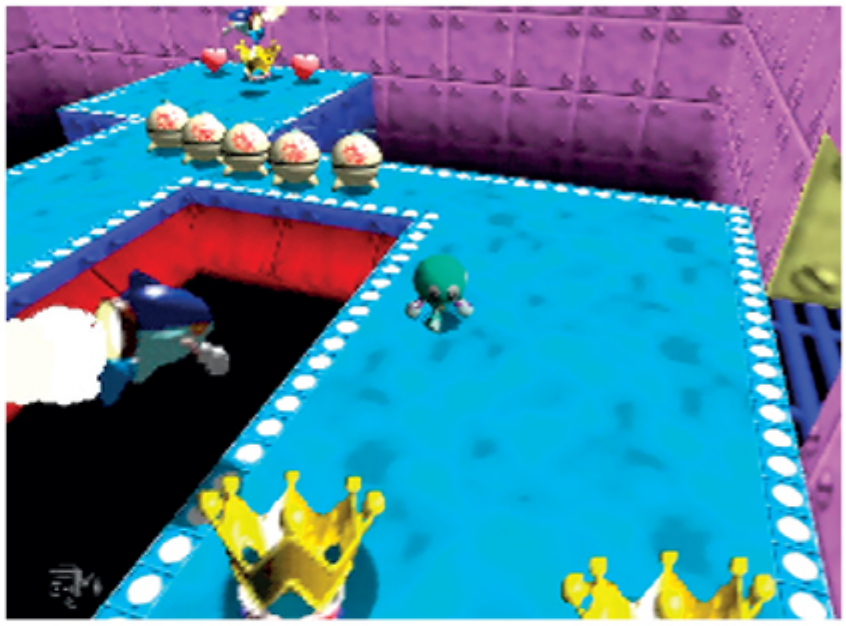
To be fair, if you lived in Japan the title may have been less obvious because it was known as Let's Smash there. Probably just as well it's about tennis, then.

CHAMELEON TWIST

Year	1997
Publisher	Sunsoft / Japan System Supply
Developer	Japan System Supply

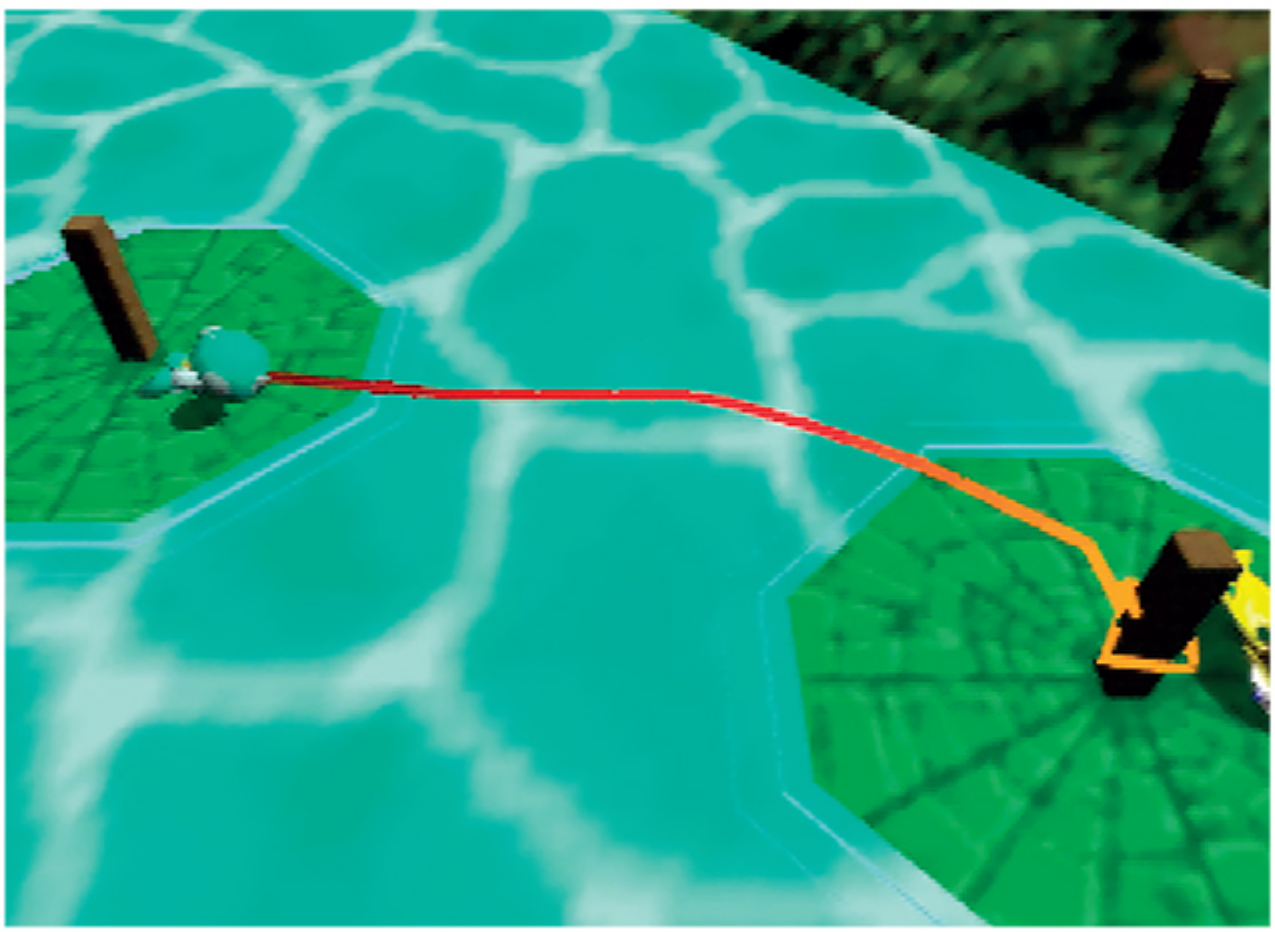
OF ALL THE games that let players use the hero's tongue as their main weapon, Chameleon Twist is… well, it's one of them at least. It tells the story of Davy, a blue chameleon who's happily minding his own business, resting on his favourite tree stump, when a white rabbit in a suit (who would do wise to stay away from Lewis Carroll's lawyers) runs past and jumps into a pot filled with rainbow-coloured light. Davy decides to follow the rabbit to see what's going on and leaps into the pot, which transports him to a strange jungle habitat he doesn't recognise. As if that wasn't disconcerting enough, Davy realises he no longer has a chameleon's body, but is actually standing on two legs and wearing gloves and a backpack. It's up to Davy to find the white rabbit, discover what's going on then figure out how to get back home and back to his four-legged chameleon self. If you don't like the look of Davy or the colour blue sends you into uncontrollable vomiting fits, you can choose from one of his three friends instead: Linda (who's a red chameleon), Fred (who's blue) or (who's green). All three of them are completely identical to Davy in terms of performance, they're really just an elaborate way of letting you pick your favourite colour for your protagonist.

The main gimmick, as previously hinted at, is the ability to use Davy's tongue for various purposes (and they're all above board, so stop thinking what you're thinking). When the player holds the B button Davy's tongue begins to unroll, and as it does you can steer it with the Control Stick until it reaches its maximum length. This can be used in multiple ways, depending on the situation. Grab a stake planted in the ground, for example, and Davy's tongue will wrap around it and grip it, allowing players to either pull themselves over to it or use it to swing around (google the 'Jump It' lap counter toy if you can't picture this). Naturally, he can also use his tongue to attack enemies. By guiding the tongue into multiple enemies at once, Davy can then retract it and swallow them all with one gulp, before spitting them out at other enemies: either one at a time, in a machine gun style, or arranged in a big shish kebab style stick.



FACT

If you've collected 50 crowns by the time you reach the Ghost Castle stage, you can open a door that leads to a strange pool mini-game where you use Davy's tongue as a cue to hit the balls.



There are six stages to play through – Jungle Land, Ant Land, Bomb Land, Desert Castle, Kids Land and Ghost Castle – and once you've exhausted your enjoyment in the single player mode you can then move on to the battle mode, where 2–4 players can fight each other in a tongue-based battle royale where the last player left on the stage at the end is the winner. Chameleon Twist is proof that even the strangest ideas can be game-worthy if they're executed well enough, and while it may not have gone down as one of the most critically acclaimed titles on the Nintendo 64, it's safe to say the console's library would have been that little less colourful had it never existed. ■

CHAMELEON TWIST 2

Year 1998
Publisher Sunsoft / Japan System Supply
Developer Japan System Supply

BECAUSE THE NINTENDO 64 presumably needed more than one tongue-based platformer, Chameleon Twist 2 arrived a year later and offered generally more of the same. This extends to the plot too, which isn't drastically different from that of the original game. Having reverted back to his old chameleon self and returned to his homeland (spoilers), Davy is once again minding his business while sitting on a seesaw, when all of a sudden the white rabbit from the previous game falls out of the sky and lands on it. This sends Davy flying up into the air and back to the distant land he was in before, once again transforming him into a two-legged freak. Not the same one as before, mind you: this time Davy and chums look more like anthropomorphic chameleons rather than the weird humanoid creatures from before. Despite the new visual appearance, Davy still has all the same tongue-based tricks as before. This time he actually has something in his backpack, too: a parasol which can be used to open up when he's falling to slow down his descent. He can also now attach his tongue to horizontal stakes which are found in the side of walls, allowing him to spin around on a different axis. These tweaks aside, Chameleon Twist 2 doesn't hugely divert from what its predecessor offered, meaning fans of the first game should feel right at home with what's essentially a further six extra worlds to play through. That said, anyone who loved the first game's multiplayer will be disappointed because the sequel is single-player only. ■

FACT

If you don't like the more 'realistic' chameleon design and prefer the weird bulb-headed heroes from the first game, get the Japanese version because it kept the original designs.

CHARLIE BLAST'S TERRITORY

Year 1999
Publisher Kemco
Developer Realtime Associates

CHARLIE BLAST IS a demolition expert who's been challenged by the evil King of Industry to take on a series of fiendish bomb-based puzzles. There are 60 of these puzzles in total, and each takes the form of a floating island with a bunch of bombs and other obstacles on it. Charlie's task is relatively simple: arrange the bombs and objects in such a way that when he triggers the single red detonator bomb, it will cause a chain reaction that blows up every other bomb on the stage. Since bombs can generally be a tiny bit dangerous, Charlie has to make sure that not only does he make all the bombs explode in one go, he also manages to do so completely unscathed so he can move on to the next stage in one single Charlie-shaped piece instead of a bunch of smaller ones (thankfully the detonator bomb has a timer, to give him time to run away to safety before it blows). This concept may be familiar to some, and it should be: the game is a remake of Bombuzal, which was originally developed for home computers in the UK in the late '80s but was then published on the SNES under the name Ka-Blooey (see the *SNES Encyclopedia*, which you almost definitely should already own). As well as the single-player mode there are also two multiplayer modes where up to four players can compete as different characters (including Charlie's girlfriend Rainbow Fairy, in case you were wondering about his relationship status). ■

FACT

The PlayStation version was called The Bombing Islands. Despite having the same stages, it was developed by a different team and starred Kemco's platforming mascot Kid Clown.

CHOPPER ATTACK

Year	1997
Publisher	SETA / Midwar / GT Interactive
Developer	SETA Corporation

WHEN IT COMES to terrorist groups, Guren-no-kiba are certainly not to be messed with. They've got a bunch of different factions all over the world, you see, and they're using them to commit various atrocities and other general wrongdoing on a global scale. Not content with simply stealing some of the world's most dangerous weapons (which they've done too, of course), they've also kidnapped a bunch of American scientists and used them to create their own proprietary technologies, the likes of which have never been seen before. And if this is starting to sound like a real life terrorist group then don't worry, because here's the twist: they're working towards their final goal, which is creating an android soldier that will make them completely unstoppable. That's right, they're making androids. As part of a nameless group of skilled international special forces types, Chopper Attack (known as Wild Choppers in Japan) gives you a simple mission: destroy Guren-no-kiba until not even a single poxy robot head is left.

Although your enemy is armed with all manner of modern firepower, all you've got at your disposal is a selection of helicopters, albeit powerful prototype choppers with a wide arsenal of weaponry. There are eight different pilots to choose from, but I hope you like America because despite it apparently being an international group five of them come from the United States. Making up the rest of the numbers are Andy Fellows from the UK, Alicia Anderson from Russia and the Japanese soldier Jun Motofuji (who apparently 'excelled at helicopters at a young age,' despite the obvious questions about why a child was allowed to fly one). Each pilot has their own trademark chopper, and naturally they each have their own strengths and weaknesses. 54-year-old veteran Danny Gregg, for example, flies the Whale-32, which is probably slower than an actual whale flying a helicopter but has enough armour to resist a heavy barrage. Meanwhile, 24-year-old rookie Mike Roberts favours the Sky Turbo which, you guessed it, is extremely fast and agile in the skies but has such poor armour that a terrorist could probably slap it out of the air with a fly swatter.

FACT

There's an odd little cheat that lets you turn bad. If you hold down Z, Up-C and Down-C then fire a cluster missile at any enemy plane, the US president will eject out of it, meaning it was actually his plane. Doesn't explain why it was shooting at you first.

Instead of simply providing you with a set array of weaponry, the game gives you a budget before each mission and asks you to spend it on whatever weapons you see fit. If you know a stage is going to contain more ground-based targets, you're going to want to buy more air-to-ground missiles, whereas if you've been told it's going to have a lot of airborne opponents you should probably invest more of your funds on air-to-ground missiles. That sort of thing. Should you run out of ammo you've also got a trusty Vulcan Cannon, which is weak but has infinite ammo and can hit all targets. At one point you even get to unlock a special weapon called the Alien Disruptor, which fires a green plasma blast which locks on to the alien ships you eventually encounter. You know, just in case it wasn't clear enough that this isn't an entirely serious game, what with the whole android plot. ■

CLAYFIGHTER 63⅓

Year	1997
Publisher	Interplay
Developer	Interplay

THE 16-BIT ERA certainly wasn't lacking in one-on-one fighting games, and the vast majority of them struggled to make an impact in a crowded environment. A few of them did stand out, however, usually because they offered something different rather than just a straight Street Fighter II imitation. One notable example of this was ClayFighter (and its sequel ClayFighter 2: Judgment Clay), which gained attention for its comedic tone and its use of a claymation-like motion capture style that digitised real clay sculptures and scanned them into the game as sprites (in a similar style to Mortal Kombat with its real-life actors).

Although it wasn't quite the best fighting game series ever made, ClayFighter sold enough to justify a move to the next generation, and the result was ClayFighter 63⅓, a title seemingly inspired by legendary spoof films The Naked Gun 2½ and The Naked Gun 33⅓. The third game in the series kicks things up a notch by incorporating fully 3D, polygonal arenas with a rotating camera (though the characters are still 2D claymation sprites). Most of the game's stages actually consist of multiple rooms, and by attacking enemies near the edge of the stage, you can kick them into the next room and continue the fight there. A new Claytality feature lets you perform Mortal Kombat style finishing moves on your opponents, though these generally just tend to end in them being sliced in half or smooshed into a lump (entirely bloodless, of course, because they're clay). The combat system, meanwhile, is upgraded with the addition of parry move (which lets you knock special moves out of the way without taking block damage) and a new combo system similar to that in the Killer Instinct games.

Most of the game's initial roster consists of fan favourites from the previous two ClayFighter games. Evil snowman Bad Mr Frosty, the shapeshifting Blob, pumpkin-headed ghost Ickybod Clay, psycho clown Bonker and the sugary Taffy all return from the first ClayFighter, while Schwarzenegger-inspired rabbit Hoppy is back from the sequel. Newcomers, meanwhile, include Sumo Santa (who's just an extremely obese Santa Claus who attacks people with his enormous gut), mad scientist final boss Dr Kilnklein and a stereotypical voodoo priest called Houngan. Speaking of stereotypes, there's also a Chinese kung fu chef called Kung Pow who absolutely would not be allowed to be in a game in this day and age given both his look and his outrageous 'Engrish' voice acting (sample dialogue: 'Would you rike soy sauce with that?'). Rounding off the roster are two guest characters from other 16-bit games published by Interplay. Earthworm Jim is available as part of the main line-up and is available from the start, while fart-powered SNES and Mega Drive superhero Boogerman also appears as an unlockable character. And when a man who defeats enemies with the power of his own flatulence is considered one of the high points of the character roster, that perhaps says more than any summary I could commit to paper. ■

FACT

By the time Earthworm Jim appeared as a guest here, he'd had his own animated TV series where he was voiced by Dan Castellaneta (aka Homer Simpson). Castellaneta not only voices Jim in this game, but Boogerman too.

CLAYFIGHTER: SCULPTOR'S CUT

Year	1998
Publisher	Interplay
Developer	Interplay

IT WAS WELL-KNOWN among Nintendo fans that ClayFighter 33⅓ wasn't the full package originally planned. A *Nintendo Power* preview of the game listed its characters and a bunch of them didn't appear in the final game, meaning it was clear cuts had been made somewhere before release. This was eventually remedied with the Sculptor's Cut, an expanded version that was exclusive to Blockbuster Video as a rental. The Sculptor's Cut added in four characters who had previously been cut from 33⅓: a giant severed hand called High Five, a trio of pygmy brothers called the Zappa Yow Yow Boyz, a vicious dog called Lockjaw (who actually appeared on the 33⅓ box, which is awkward) and an animated Statue of Liberty called Lady Liberty. This brought the total roster up to a more respectable 16 fighters, closer to what Interplay had originally planned. To add a bit more lore to the story there's also a new plot, and each character now has a rivalry with another character, which is revealed near the end of the game. Because it was only ever a Blockbuster rental title and people could only get it in ex-rental sales (or by renting it and never returning it), Sculptor's Cut is one of the rarer Nintendo 64 games out there. The cartridge alone has been known to sell for up to $1,000 depending on its condition, and – since many Blockbuster stores didn't include manuals or boxes with ex-rental sales – complete boxed copies can go for multiple thousands. ■

FACT

There was a fifth character who was planned for the game and also appeared in the *Nintendo Power* preview: a drunken security guard called HoboCop. Unsurprisingly, Nintendo asked for him to be dropped.

COMMAND & CONQUER

Year	1999
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Looking Glass Studios

WHEN IT WAS originally released on PC in 1995, Command & Conquer wasn't the first ever real-time strategy game: 1992's Dune II is generally considered to be the first notable example. Over time, however, it's widely accepted to be the first game to give the genre widespread appeal, to the extent that many people immediately think of Command & Conquer when they think about RTS games. This Nintendo 64 port came four years later and was drastically different from the PC version, in terms of both form and function. The general concept remains the same: playing as the commander of one of two warring factions (the Global Defense Initiative and the Brotherhood of Nod), you have to issue orders to your army to attack enemies, gather resources and build and develop bases. The N64 version opts for a completely different look, however, ditching the sprite-based graphics of the PC game (and its subsequent PlayStation and Saturn ports) and instead going for a polygonal engine. Some of its stages had to be tweaked too: although the main campaigns are still based on those of the PC version, because that game was played with a mouse and keyboard and therefore offered players quicker control during particularly tense moments, some of the levels were adapted to accommodate the slower movement of the cursor with the Control Stick. The game's CD soundtrack was also replaced with an N64-generated MIDI one, but Nintendo owners did get four exclusive Special Ops missions to give them at least something to boast about. ■

FACT

There are 35 unused maps hidden in the game's code, including the PlayStation version's exclusive maps and a bunch of PC ones. Most would've been unplayable though, because they needed features that weren't in the N64 game.

CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY

Year	2001	
Publisher	Rare / THQ	
Developer	Rare	

FEW GAMES HAVE seen such a seismic shift of tone during their development than Conker's Bad Fur Day did. Originally revealed during the E3 Expo in 1997 under the title Conker's Quest, and shown again at the following year's show as Twelve Tales: Conker 64, the game was originally supposed to be an extremely colourful and cheery platformer in the style of Super Mario 64, in which an endearingly happy squirrel called Conker and his companion Berri collected nuts. Press response to Twelve Tales was mixed: while many were impressed at the game's visual detail, others were critical of its overly cuddly, twee nature, and felt it was maybe a little too saccharine even for the 3D platforming genre. This wasn't to last, though, and eventually – after constant infighting among the games development team led to the game essentially being scrapped for a while – the cute and cuddly concept was replaced with a far more mature tone, with the game getting its final name change to Conker's Bad Fur Day. The resulting game was a big surprise to players when it was released, not least because it was exclusive to the generally family-friendly Nintendo 64 (the North American version even had a note running across the bottom of the box saying: 'This game is not for anyone under age 17.')

The game opens with Conker enjoying a few pints at his local pub, the Cock & Plucker. After a particularly heavy session which ends

with him waking up the next day in the woods, a severely hungover Conker has to make his way home to Berri but along the way finds himself getting into all manner of situations, from getting involved in an ongoing rivalry between bees and a group of wasps called Wayne and the Wankas, to eventually ending up in a warzone situation where he's enlisted with an army of grey squirrels to take out a squad of Nazi-like teddy bears called the Tediz. In the most infamous section, he even comes face to face with the Great Mighty Poo, a giant opera-singing blob of faeces who demands to be fed sweetcorn and can only be defeated by throwing toilet rolls into his mouth while he sings such lines as 'I am the Great Mighty Poo and I'm going to throw my s**t at you' and other things I probably can't write here in case children are reading.

FACT

The first Conker's Quest prototype inspired a separate Rare team to make a 3D platformer. That team went on to develop and release both Banjo-Kazooie and Banjo-Tooie before Bad Fur Day made it to the shelves.

All this scatalogical mirth would be for naught if the game itself wasn't fun to play but Rare's pedigree ensured that Conker's Bad Fur Day was critically well received for its platforming mastery as much as its potty mouth. Despite this, game was considered a commercial failure due to numerous reasons (releasing at the end of the N64's life, the older target market) and as such it's a very rare game (pun intended). Those looking to try it out would perhaps be better served by buying the Xbox One compilation Rare Replay, which features an HD version of the N64 game (as opposed to its more censored Xbox remake Conker: Live & Reloaded). ■

CRUIS'N USA

Year	1996
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Williams

CRUIS'N USA WAS initially an extremely important title, as far as Nintendo was concerned. In 1994, Nintendo had agreed a deal with Midway that would allow Midway to publish two arcade titles – Cruis'n USA and Killer Instinct – and market them as the first games running on Ultra 64 hardware. Indeed, the attract mode for the arcade version of Cruis'n USA displays the Nintendo Ultra 64 logo to make arcade-goers aware of what they were playing. Well, sort of. In reality, the arcade game wasn't actually running off Nintendo 64 hardware at all, and was instead running on Midway's own hardware. As a result, the arcade version was a little more visually impressive than what Nintendo 64 owners would eventually get when the game was finally ported to home hardware two years later.

As the name suggests, Cruis'n USA is a racing game where the aim is to drive across America. Starting off at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, players make their way through the Route 101 highway towards California, cut through one of the Redwood National and State Parks, proceed through the streets of Beverly Hills, move on to the LA Freeway then zoom through Death Valley. They then finally leave California for Arizona and the Grand Canyon, before making their way through the cornfields of Iowa, the streets of Chicago, then Indiana and Appalachia before finally arriving at Washington DC and finishing in front of the White House. Although technically spanning the entire width of the United States, heavy emphasis is placed on the west and east coasts without much love being given to the middle of the country.

There are four cars to choose from initially, each being an unofficial replica of a real car. There's the '63 Muscle Car (Chevrolet Corvette), La Bomba (1940 Ford V-8 De Luxe), Devastator IV (Hyundai HCD-Epoch II) and the game's most iconic car, the shiny red Italia P69 (a Ferrari Testarossa). While each is suitably sporty, by using a special cheat code – holding C-Up, C-Down and C-Left on the car selection screen – some of them can be replaced with slightly less suitable alternatives: an ATV (based on a Jeep Wrangler), a police car and a school bus.

Being a Midway game from the mid '90s, Cruis'n USA was required by law to make use of digitised live action characters like Mortal Kombat and NBA Jam did. Although the game's vehicles were polygonal, it did star a number of real-life people, many of whom were wearing very little clothing. These included the bikini-clad babe who waves the flag at the start of the race, the buxom woman who gives you a trophy if you finish in first and a squad of – you guessed it – scantily clad ladies standing at the finish line, waiting to shower you with praise. This was very much a product of the mid '90s. Cruis'n USA developed something of a bad reputation for being a substandard racing game, but time has been relatively kind to it and it remains playable to this day, if not the ground-breaking title Nintendo and Midway had originally hoped. ■

FACT

The Washington DC stage has a tunnel which is made up of giant $100 bills. In the arcade version these bills show Hillary Clinton smoking a cigar, these were changed back to standard Benjamin Franklin notes for the N64 version.

CRUIS'N WORLD

Year	1998
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Eurocom

CRUIS'N USA MAY ultimately not have become the ground-breaking, must-have racing game Nintendo and Midway would have perhaps hoped for, but that didn't stop them making a sequel, this time with developer Eurocom handling development duties for the home version. At its core Cruis'n World is similar to its predecessor in that the main Cruis'n mode has the player driving through a series of themed tracks. This time, however – and I'm sure you've figured this out already by now – instead of making your way across the United States, you're now racing across locations from all over the world.

There are 14 tracks in total – Germany, Egypt, Hawaii, New York, England, France, Kenya, Italy, China, Australia, Mexico, Russia, Japan and Florida – each with their own distinctive landmarks to make them stand out. There are now also 12 cars to choose from at the start of the game, and once again these are clearly based on real vehicles despite not being licensed in the game. The Scarab, for example, is clearly supposed to be a Volkswagen Beetle, the Orca is similar to the Porsche 993, and the tiny, odd-looking Sardine Extreme is based on the Daihatsu Midget. This time there are also 13 extra cars to unlock by playing through the game's Time Trial mode. These are mainly just cars that appear in the game already as traffic: an ambulance, a school bus, a taxi, that sort of thing.

FACT

Midway actually sent staff around the world to take photos of real landmarks and digitise them in the game. According to designer Eugene Jarvis, getting photos online would have been no substitute for the real thing.

The main addition to Cruis'n World's gameplay is the ability to pull off stunts while racing. By double tapping the accelerator, for example, you can tilt the car back on its back two wheels and pop a large wheelie to get a brief speed boost. Alternatively, you can do it while turning to tip the car sideways and drive on two wheels that way. Some of the tracks also have a number of jumps that let you perform tricks. Successfully pulling off one of these can add a couple of seconds back to your timer, meaning when you're playing on higher difficulty levels it's almost essential in your attempt to finish the race in enough time.

Although this new stunt system meant Cruis'n World did play a little differently to Cruis'n USA, some elements from the first game did return for the sequel. And yes, this included the return of the scantily clad women, although as awkward as their appearance was in the original it's downright irresponsible in the sequel. That's because when you beat the Cruis'n World mode, you unlock a final 15th track which is set on the Moon. Sure enough, when you reach the finish line, the same bikini-clad women are standing there, cheering you on. Try to enjoy your win despite being fully aware that because they aren't wearing spacesuits they'll clearly be dead within seconds. That's dedication to the 'cheering for cars' cause in anyone's book. ■

CRUIS'N EXOTICA

Year	2000
Publisher	Midway
Developer	Gratuitous Games

NINTENDO HAD PRETTY much had its fill of the Cruis'n series by the time it reached its third game, leaving Midway to publish the game itself with San Diego studio Gratuitous Games hired to port the arcade version to the Nintendo 64. Although Cruis'n World added some new mechanics to the gameplay element such as the stunt system, Cruis'n Exotica is far less revolutionary in that sense. To all intents and purposes, it's a case of 'more of the same', playing very much like its predecessor but with different cars and tracks to play through. That said, Exotica's performance is far better than World's, with a much smoother frame rate that comes a lot closer to a stable 30 frames per second.

As the third game in the series, Exotica is faced with an obvious question: when you've already driven across America then taken on the entire world, where exactly can you go from there? It turns out the answer is something of a mixture, with the majority of the game's 11 stages once again taking place in real-world locations, and a couple of bizarre fictional and other-worldly ones thrown in to make things interesting. As the name suggests, though, each of these destinations has something of the exotic about them, so there's no driving along drab highways this time.

Starting off in the South Korean countryside, you then take part in an underwater race past the lost city of Atlantis(!) as giant whales and fish swim past you. After this, it's on to the Sahara desert as helicopters zoom past overheard, then a quick spin through the Hong Kong streets at night, followed by a slippery sprint across an icy Alaskan road.

A trip along the Las Vegas strip is next on the itinerary, followed by another desert road, this time in India. Ireland and Holland are after that – both offering countryside racing – then it's an off-road race through the Amazon jungle (complete with dinosaurs, because why not). A dirt track near the mountains of Tibet brings you near the end of your journey, before the 11th and final race wraps things up on Mars of all places.

This time there are 12 brand new cars to choose from, with another 16 unlockable ones. Some of the odder examples this time include a forklift, an old jalopy, one called the 'Hunkajunk' with a load of old boxes on top of it, an F1 car, a drag racer and a weird long car that looks like a canoe on wheels. A number of these cars don't have a roof, meaning you can see the driver, and that's where Cruis'n Exotica's one main addition comes into play. It's a purely cosmetic one but a slightly odd one: players can now choose what their driver looks like from a series of present characters. In typical Cruis'n style, these aren't the most 'normal' options, meaning you can race as the likes of a green Martian, a clown or a giant baby. ■

FACT

When Cruis'n USA was ported to the N64, Nintendo insisted that players couldn't run over animals in the home version. Designer Eugene Jarvis told *Edge* magazine: 'I don't know what's wrong with these people.'

CYBERTIGER

Year 2000
Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Saffire

GOLF CAN BE a difficult game to sell to younger players. Its slow pace and lack of action (at least compared to more high-intensity sports such as football, American football or basketball) make it harder to get casual audiences excited: after all, most of the time you're just staring at someone standing still in the middle of a field. Indeed, most golf games from the twentieth century tended to play things safe and deliver as authentic a recreation of the sport as technology would allow at the time, happy enough with the knowledge that it would only appeal to golf fans with no need to try to appeal to a wider audience. This changed in mid-1997, when EA Sports signed an exclusive deal with Tiger Woods to use his name and likeness on golf games. EA Sports paid around $10 million for these rights, and while the first title – Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf '99 on the PlayStation and PC – was a success, it was clear that EA did want to see if it could use its star man to get even more players involved. Its solution was CyberTiger, a wackier and more over-the-top golf game designed to appeal to kids, casual players and people who still thought the word 'cyber' was okay to use by the turn of the millennium.

CyberTiger's control system is perhaps the least eccentric thing about the game: in fact, it's a reassuringly straightforward and accurate way to play your strokes. By simply pulling the Control Stick down for the backswing then pushing it forward for the downswing you can draw and fade your shot by moving the stick at a slight angle. This makes it immediately accessible to beginners which, given the game's general tone, was clearly the intention.

Where things get a little less straightforward is in the introduction of power-ups, which can affect the way the game plays out. For example, the ball can be dramatically moved in mid-air if a shot looks like it isn't going where intended. This is accompanied by a charming effect where the ball gets a little cape like a superhero. The power-ups can be earned in a special Driving Range mode, where you tee off towards a field full of targets and other obstacles. Hitting certain objects unlocks their corresponding power-ups, so if you hit the fairground carousel you'll unlock a spin power-up whereas if your ball can reach the back wall you'll earn the distance power-up.

As for playable characters, most of the roster consists of fictional golfers. Obviously Tiger Woods is the main attraction here and, somewhat bizarrely, players can choose to either play as the adult version or Li'l Tiger, a child version of him. The same goes with the other licensed real-life golfer in the game, Mark O'Meara, so if you've ever wanted to play as a 12-year-old version of a man who didn't turn pro until he was 23 then your absurdly specific dream can finally come true. ■

FACT

There are at least 15 hidden characters in the game, ranging from a green alien called Marvin to an Elvis impersonator called Delvis, to a ghost called Festus. You can even unlock Bengal, who's just Li'l Tiger with a striped face.

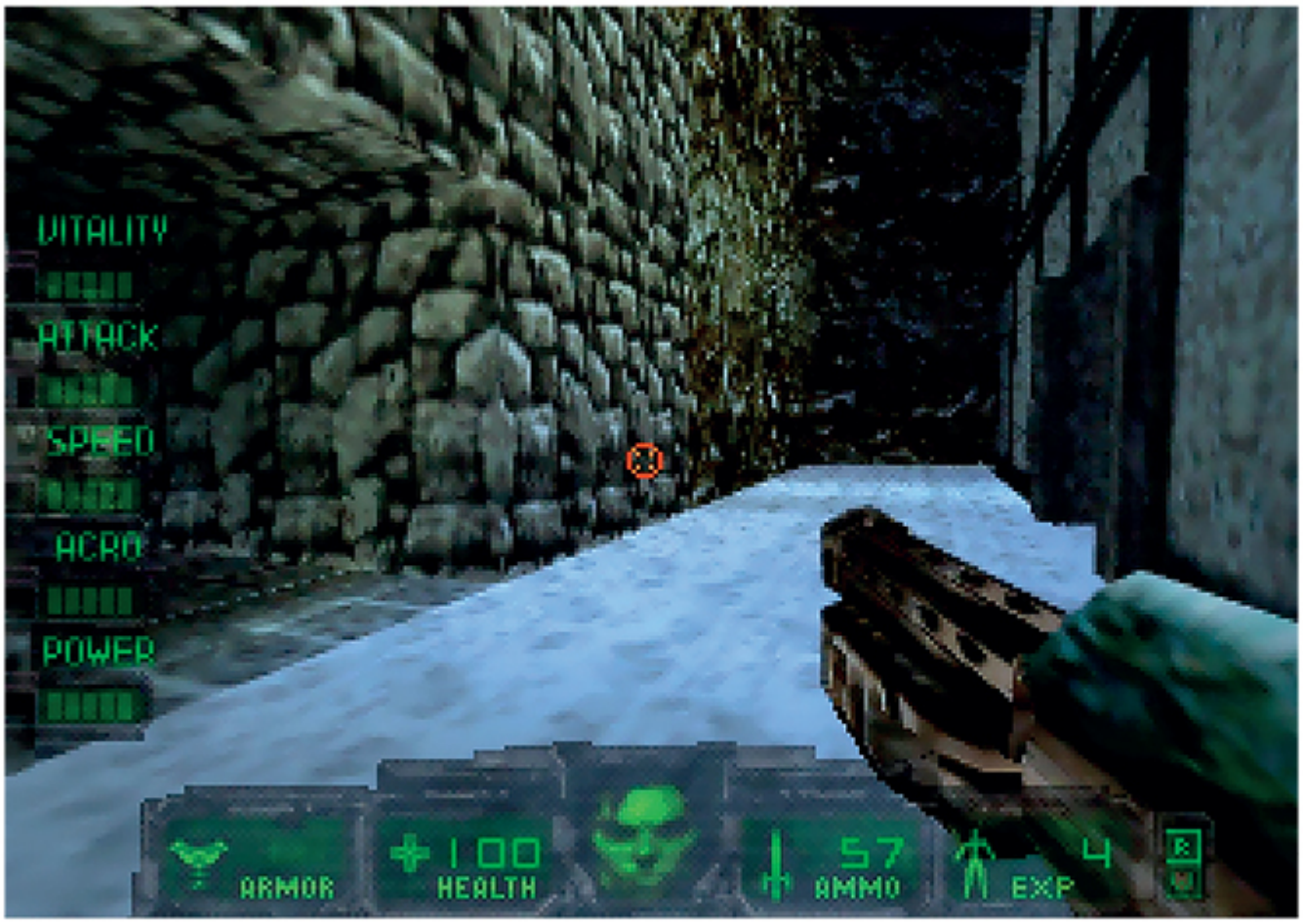
DAIKATANA

Year 2000
Publisher Kemco
Developer Kemco

EVERY NOW AND then you get a video game that is hyped up to the heavens, then ultimately fails to deliver in a catastrophic manner. The Atari 2600 adaptation of E.T. is one such example, as was the attractive but vapid 16-bit fighting game Rise of the Robots. Although Daikatana technically isn't quite as bad as those games on an entertainment level, it was the hype built up by creator John Romero that would essentially turn the game into a make-or-break product, with the result falling firmly in the latter category. Romero had earned an almost god-like reputation for being the lead designer behind the most ground-breaking games in the first-person shooter genre. Developer id Software's iconic Wolfenstein 3D, Doom, Doom II and Quake were all designed by Romero, so the natural consensus was that everything he touched turned to FPS gold. Believing the hype himself, Romero eventually left id Software following creative differences and founded his own studio, Ion Storm, to begin work on Daikatana, the apparent next step forward for the genre. The game was even teased in magazines with an extremely controversial advert that simply said 'John Romero's about to make you his bitch' with the tagline 'suck it down'. With hype behind it like that, the game was only going to explode in one of two directions, so all eyes were trained on its 1998 release date. Um… except it didn't come out in 1998. Without many of the id team that helped create the previous games (most notably lead programmer John Carmack), Romero's project suffered countless delays and eventually skulked out to extremely mediocre reviews in 2000. The game is an FPS (obviously) with a plot too complicated to fit in a single page, but essentially it boils down to the Daikatana, a powerful sword with the ability to to conquer the world. The player travels through four different time periods – Japan in 2455 AD, Greece in 1200 BC, Norway in 560 AD and San Francisco in 2030 AD – in an attempt to find the Daikatana and ensure the Fate of the world ends up in good hands. Playing as an expert swordsman called Hiro Miyamoto, you're eventually accompanied on your quest by two partners, the kidnapped Mikiko Ebihara and security chief Superfly Johnson. In the PC version, they help you solve certain puzzles throughout the game but in the N64 game they only pop up during cutscenes (which does at least mean the N64 version isn't one huge annoying escort mission like it is on PC). The disastrous reception of the game meant Romero's plan had backfired and Daikatana now has a reputation as one of the most disappointing game releases of all time, with only around 40,000 copies sold in total. It's a shame, then, that all of this furore led to the top-down Game Boy Color port being denied an American release and only coming to Europe and Japan, despite actually being very good. But that's for another book, wink wink. ■

FACT

In the US the N64 version of Daikatana was originally released as a rental-only title, before eventually being sold at retailers for the budget price of $19.99. And it still didn't sell.



DARK RIFT

Year 1997
Publisher Vic Tokai
Developer Kronos Digital Entertainment

ALTHOUGH STREET FIGHTER 2 and its numerous sequels were arguably instrumental in the success of the SNES, the Nintendo 64 ultimately didn't end up with a single Street Fighter game to its name. Instead, a number of other challengers battled head-to-head in an attempt to claim the crown of best N64 fighting game. Dark Rift was one of the earliest competitors and it quickly gained praise for being one of the first N64 games to run at a smooth 60 frames per second, but while it was an impressive technical accomplishment its actual combat mechanics were met with somewhat less enthusiasm.

Like all fighting games of the era, Dark Rift has a suitably over-the-top plot that serves as an elaborate excuse to have people knocking lumps out of each other. It tells the story of an evil Emperor called Sonork who owns the Core Prime Element, one of three pieces of a Master Key which contains infinite power. In an attempt to get the other two pieces, Sonork holds a tournament and puts his piece of the Master Key up as the prize, assuming that whoever owns the second piece will take part. Sonork's plan is to destroy whoever owns the second piece and, with two in his possession, find the evil Lord Demon Demitron (who has the third piece) and kill him to claim all three pieces. As one of eight warriors from around the universe, you have to beat everyone else in the tournament and defeat Sonork, taking the Core Prime Element and using it to restore balance.

Or, to cut an exceptionally long story very short, pick someone and kick everyone else's head in. And if you don't think there's a secret final fight against Demitron at the end, then you must never have played a fighting game before.

Dark Rift is actually the unofficial sequel to Sega Saturn fighting game Criticom – its original working title was Criticom II – and, as with its unofficial predecessor, has a heavy focus on weapons-based fighting. Each of the eight playable characters (Sonork and Demitron can be unlocked with a code) has their own unique weapon, from meathead Aaron Maverick's huge MFG-16 gun to female warrior Scarlet Zerai's special 'Dragon Slayer' sword, to Demonica Gkroux, who's your obligatory 'weird one with Freddy Krueger claws'. Each character has vertical attack, horizontal attack and kick buttons, as well as a selection of special moves including at least one projectile (though these are pretty slow). Although the game takes place in a 3D arena, combat is usually limited to one plane, with players simply moving forwards or backwards as in a typical 2D fighting game. The only time three-dimensional movement comes into play is the ability to sidestep to the left or right (with the L and R buttons) to dodge incoming attacks. Another thing it sidesteps is typical fighting game convention when it comes to rounds: instead of a 'best 2 out of 3' situation, it's a 'best 3 out of 5' one, though you can change this in the options. ■

FACT

The name refers to the rift in space that was formed when the Master Key was originally found. If you don't like the title just go by the much better Japanese one, Space Dynamites.

DESTRUCTION DERBY 64

Year	1999
Publisher	THQ
Developer	Looking Glass Studios

THE ORIGINAL DESTRUCTION Derby was one of the biggest initial hits on the Sony PlayStation, partly thanks to its appearance on the demo disc that originally came free with the console. After a similarly well received sequel, the series was then moved to the Nintendo 64 with Destruction Derby 64, a brand new entry that had nothing to do with its predecessors in more ways than one. The core concept is the same: as the title implies, it's a racing game where smashing into your opponents is just as important (if not more so) than the actual racing itself. Where it differs from the PlayStation games, however, is the scoring system, which focuses less on tactical collisions and more on high-impact ones. In the PlayStation games, players were given points for hitting their opponents in the side and spinning them, with greater scores given for 90°, 180° and 360° spins. The Nintendo 64 sequel completely abandons this and goes for its own unique scoring system that doesn't take spinning into account at all.

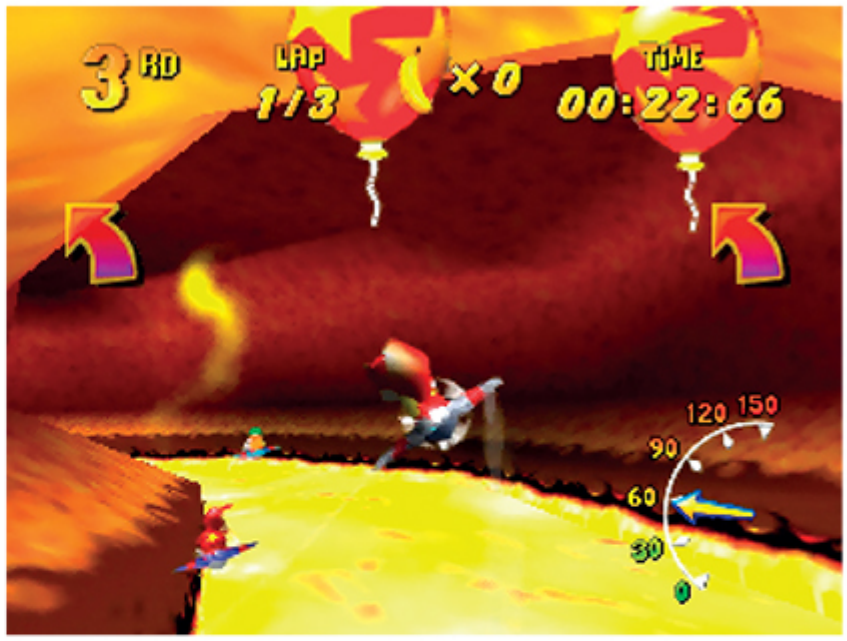
The game is split into races and arena battles, each with their own separate methods of totting up points. Arena battles are self-explanatory: you're placed in a bowl-like area and simply get points for each crash (up to 100 depending on the impact, plus an extra 20 if you 'kill' them by making their car explode). The races, meanwhile, are a little more complicated, as players have to juggle wrecking and racing. Points are still given for collisions, but there's also a timer ticking down, meaning players have to keep moving forward and hitting checkpoints to top it up a little (getting 20 points every time they do so). In a sense, then, players can also do reasonably well by avoiding damage and simply driving round and round as often as they can until the timer eventually runs out. To make things interesting, races split the cars into two groups, each travelling round the track in opposite directions. This ensures that head-on collisions are far more frequent, making carnage a guarantee. The game's main World Championship mode lets you take on a series of races with four difficulty levels, each unlocking a bonus car. Additional cars are also awarded for clearing the eight time trial stages within a certain time. Once all the vehicles have been collected the total number will have doubled from 12 to 24, allowing players to compete in the likes of a taxi, a low rider, a police car and an ambulance (that last one would probably be useful given the circumstances). Destruction Derby 64 may have offered a somewhat different experience to its PlayStation predecessors, and it may not have enjoyed the same level of popularity – mainly because it launched a few years into the N64's life instead of during the launch window – but despite this it still has a reputation for being an entertaining enough game in its own right, and one that's still worth tracking down as a standalone smash 'em up. ■

FACT

There were five games in the Destruction Derby series in total, of which the N64 game was the third. It was the only Destruction Derby that wasn't developed in the UK.

DIDDY KONG RACING

Year	1997
Publisher	Rare
Developer	Rare



WHEN TIMBER THE tiger's parents go on holiday to stay with the Kongs the evil Wizpig invades his island, sealing off the various race tracks located there and employing its four guardians as his henchmen. Worried that Wizpig will take over the island for good, Timber writes a letter to his friend Diddy Kong, asking for help. Diddy recruits his pals Banjo and Conker and the trio head to the island, while a curious Kremling called Krunch follows them to see what's going on. So begins Diddy Kong Racing, the Mario Kart competitor that bucked the steadily growing karting game trend by introducing a Story mode to proceedings. Whereas Mario Kart 64 was renowned for its four-player multiplayer gameplay. Diddy Kong Racing was instead better known for its single-player mode, which almost borrowed as much from Super Mario 64 as it did Nintendo's racing series.

The Adventure mode puts Diddy – or any of the other seven initially playable characters – in an open hub world that leads to a number of different themed areas. The tracks are all sealed behind doors, which can only be opened once the player collects a certain number of golden balloons. These balloons can be earned by winning races, but are also dotted around the hub area and are awarded for completing silver coin challenges (where you have to collect 8 coins during a race and still finish in 1st place). The aim is to continue earning balloons and winning races until you get to challenge each of the four guardians – Tricky the Triceratops, Bluey the Walrus, Bubbler the Octopus and Smokey the Dragon – beat them and eventually reach Wizpig for a final showdown.

FACT

An official soundtrack for the game was released in the west, on a special CD shaped like Diddy Kong's face. Unfortunately, because it wasn't round, it wouldn't work on many CD players.

Diddy Kong Racing offers a number of interesting features that set it apart from Mario Kart and other traditional karting games, the most obvious being the ability to race in either a kart, an aeroplane or a hovercraft. It also tweaks the typical item system by allowing players to choose which power-ups they collect. Rather than a single weapon box that randomly chooses an item for the player, weapons are instead included in coloured balloons and fall into different categories: missiles, boosts, droppable weapons and shields. Players can deliberately run over the specific item they want, and can then power it up further by running over more balloons of the same colour in succession. Behind an opponent and don't want to waste your time picking up oil slicks? Just run over a couple of red balloons and arm yourself with a homing rocket, then blow their bum off. Diddy Kong Racing was critically acclaimed at launch as an exceptional single-player racer (albeit a difficult one), and even though it wasn't even supposed to star Diddy Kong in the first place – during development it was going to be a sequel to NES racing game RC Pro-Am – it ultimately became regarded as one of the finest releases in what was already a golden era of Rare games. ■

DONALD DUCK: QUACK ATTACK

Year	2000
Publisher	Ubisoft
Developer	Ubisoft Casablanca

DAISY DUCK, WHO'S apparently a famous TV reporter (which will probably be news to you) is on top of the world after managing to gain access to the secret temple of the evil magician Merlock. A scoop like that is a monumental moment for journalism, but unfortunately things don't go quite as planned and just as Daisy is about to show viewers the money shot of Merlock in his temple, she's discovered and the broadcast cuts out. Worried that Daisy might be in danger, Donald and his rival Gladstone Gander both head out to find her. Gladstone sets off on a more conventional trip around the world, but Donald instead decides to use his inventor chum Gyro Gearloose's special teleport system. There's just one problem: while the teleport system can get Donald to Merlock's temple, it needs more power to manage it. It's up to Donald, then, to head to three different locations – Duckie Mountain, Duckburg and Magica DeSpell's Manor – and place antennas there, in order to boost Gyro's teleport system enough to send him to Merlock's temple.

Quack Attack (known as Donald Duck: Goin' Quackers in North America) plays like your standard 3D platformer, especially if the standard 3D platformer you're looking at happens to be Crash Bandicoot. As with the PlayStation hit, each of the game's stages tend to be linear affairs with either an over-the-shoulder viewpoint as Donald runs into the screen, or a side-scrolling viewpoint in 2.5D sections where movement is locked to left or right only. Each of the four main locations has four stages, but reaching the end of each stage is only half the job: Donald also has to find a warp boss icon hidden in each of them, and each of these makes up a quarter of a special portal that leads to the boss for that area. Only once all four of these are found can the player open the Boss Portal and take on the boss. To add further replay value, each stage also has three teddy bears hidden in them (belonging to Huey, Dewey and Louie). Finding all 12 bears across the four stages will unlock a special fifth bonus stage. You can also redo each stage for special time trials where you have to beat Gladstone's best time. Beating the set times on all five stages in an area will earn Donald a new outfit (a vacation shirt, a suit of armour, a black sailor suit as seen in old Disney comics and a red soldier costume).

FACT

Although Quack Attack plays similarly to Crash Bandicoot, the game was actually based on an optimised version of Ubisoft's Rayman engine.

Quack Attack was fairly well received when it was released: it didn't make any Game of the Year lists but nobody was mortally offended by its existence either. Critics generally agreed that it was a perfectly enjoyable platformer that was a little on the easy side, though given its obviously younger target audience there was nothing necessarily wrong with that. It's probably just as well, given that it was released on no fewer than eight different platforms. ■

DONKEY KONG 64

Year 1999
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Rare

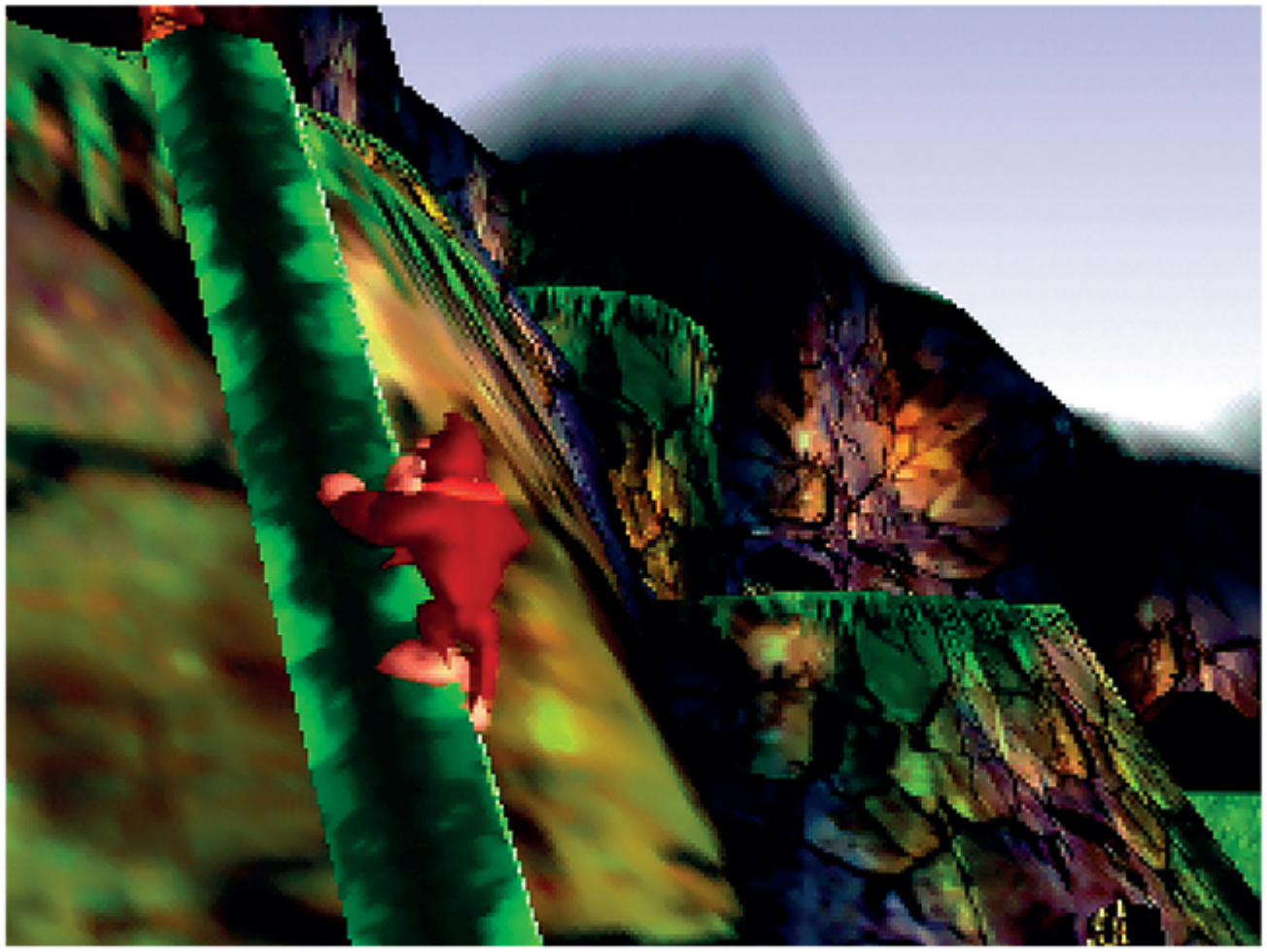
THERE AREN'T MANY (if any) other games in this book that are usually defined online by their intro sequence, but Donkey Kong 64 is a rare case (pun always intended) because it features one of the most memorable intros of all time, one that has become part of internet memedom. If you're unfamiliar with the DK Rap, it's your solemn duty to put this book down, go to YouTube and watch it now, before reading the rest of this article. All done? Okay, let's continue.

Although Rare had seemingly left the Donkey Kong Country series behind after the SNES trilogy, it couldn't quite resist returning to Donkey Kong and his crew for one more adventure, and a truly polygonal one this time as opposed to the pre-rendered 3D sprites of the 16-bit games. King K. Rool, the villain of the previous games, has returned once again and this time he's riding a huge island-shaped ship (he doesn't really do subtlety, this chap). The ship is armed with an enormous weapon called the Blast-O-Matic, which K. Rool wants to use to destroy Kong Isle once and for all. It seems like a sound idea in practice, were it not for the fact that K. Rool's crew members are about as useful as a chocolate teapot, and before long they end up crashing the ship, which in turn damages the Blast-O-Matic and renders it useless. K. Rool's army general comes up with a good idea: since Donkey Kong will clearly be on his way to give K. Rool a kicking before the Blast-O-Matic can be fixed, K. Rool's troops will keep him distracted by kidnapping Donkey Kong's friends Diddy, Lanky, Tiny and Chunky (as well as DK's banana stash because let's face it, it's become a tradition by now). This should hopefully keep Donkey Kong busy long enough for K. Rool's engineers to fix the Blast-O-Matic and blow Kong Isle to smithereens.

FACT

Donkey Kong 64 was one of only two N64 games that needed an Expansion Pak to run at all, so one was included in the box at no extra cost.

Starting off as Donkey Kong, players can eventually find and rescue the rest of the team and swap between them during the game. Each has their own special abilities, meaning the player needs to switch between them regularly on their adventure. Donkey Kong, for example, has the ability to pull levers, while Diddy Kong has a jetpack that lets him reach higher areas. Lanky Kong has a long reach which lets him hit enemies from a distance, and can also walk on his hands to get up steep slopes. Tiny Kong, meanwhile, can shrink in size and can also twirl her ponytail to float, while Chunky Kong can grow and pull off a strong punch. Donkey Kong 64 is notorious for being one of the biggest collectathons in the history of platformers: if you want to complete the game with a full 101 per cent rating (that's right), you have to get 201 golden bananas, 10 battle crowns, 20 banana fairies, 40 banana medals, eight boss keys, and two special coins. And if you can manage all that, you deserve a medal yourself. ■



DOOM 64

Year	1997
Publisher	Midway / GT Interactive / Gamebank
Developer	Midway Studios San Diego

DOOM WAS SUCH a ground-breaking first-person shooter that by the time 1997 rolled around, the 1993 original had already seen a healthy number of ports on other systems, including some that were thought impossible (a tip of the cap to the surprisingly competent SNES version). Rather than joining the likes of the Jaguar, 3DO, 32X, PlayStation and the recently released Sega Saturn versions of Doom, though, Doom 64 was actually an entirely new game and was essentially considered the third in the series (despite what 2004's Doom 3 would have you believe).

The plot takes place after the events of Doom and Doom II. Following the apparent destruction of Hell's forces, the military decides to quarantine the Mars moon Phobos and shroud it in such thick radiation that no human could ever go near it again. What they don't realise, however, is that they didn't quite manage to kill everything and there's still one creature alive. Even worse, it isn't just any old demonic grunt but the Mother Demon, an evil entity with the ability to rejuvenate dead tissue. Deciding to put her healing hands to good use, the Mother Demon brings back Hell's demons, and this time they're stronger than ever, so it's up to the hero from the first two games – affectionately known as Doomguy – to head back and finish the job once and for all by destroying everything, including the Mother Demon.

Doom 64 plays similarly to its predecessors, but while Doom II looked a lot like the first game 64 has an entirely different visual style. All the enemies have been recreated from scratch, and while they're all sprites in a 3D environment, they're now based on pre-rendered CGI characters (similar to techniques used in Donkey Kong Country) and as such they have a more 3D look. A new, more atmospheric lighting system also makes the game look significantly moodier than the previous Doom titles, while the new ambient soundtrack gives a far more unnerving feel compared to the all-out rock soundtrack of the previous games (which was obviously still brilliant in its own way). The camera has also been moved down slightly and is now at around chest level rather than head level, which may not seem like a massive change but gives the impression that all the enemies are larger, further intimidating the player. For the most part it still plays like the classic Doom games, then, but it definitely has more of a horror vibe than before.

FACT

Doom 64 has a new laser weapon called the Unmaker, but instead of telling you its name when you collect it, the game simply says 'What the !@# %* is this!'.

Despite its general critical success, and despite the fact it was a canonical third game in the Doom series, for more than two decades Doom 64 wasn't officially ported to any other systems. It wasn't until March 2020 when Bethesda, along with developer Nightdive Studios, finally re-released Doom 64 for the Switch, Xbox One, PS4 and PC, where it was given an HD update, an increased frame rate and a bunch of new stages, dubbed the Lost Levels, which tied its story to the 2016 Doom reboot. ■

DR. MARIO 64

Year	2001	✔ ✕ ✕
Publisher	Nintendo	
Developer	Newcom	

THE SIMPLISTIC NATURE of Dr. Mario on the NES and Game Boy meant it wasn't an immediately obvious choice for a sequel on Nintendo 64, but the resulting Dr. Mario 64 is one of the most feature-packed versions of the game released to date on any system. The general concept is the same: players have a giant vial with a number of viruses in it and are in charge of moving, rotating and dropping coloured pills as they fall into the vial. Players have to match up four pill segments of the same colour to clear them, and if any matching viruses of the same colour are included in the line they're eliminated too. The aim is therefore to empty the vial of its germs and in doing so come one step closer to solving all the world's diseases. Probably.

The Nintendo 64 version doesn't attempt to reinvent the wheel by swapping out the standard Dr. Mario art style for anything wildly different here. There are no snazzy 3D cameras or polygonal pills to deal with: it's a mainly sprite-based title and certainly not the most jaw-dropping example of the Nintendo 64's power as a result. What it does boast, however, is the same thoroughly entertaining Dr. Mario gameplay, as well as a number of new features, including a new Story mode that puts a little more meat on the game's bones. The story has players choosing either Dr. Mario or Wario as they both chase after the evil Mad Scienstein, who's stolen Dr. Mario's stash of megavitamins. These super pills can be used to cure the flu and it's currently flu season, so Dr. Mario wants to get them back to help keep his patients healthy, while Wario wants to get hold of them so he can sell them on for an extortionate fee, Big Pharma style (and who said video games couldn't be political).

Although the story changes a bit depending on whether you choose to play as Dr. Mario or Wario, the general idea is similar either way: players have to defeat a series of opponents in head-to-head and four-player battles in an attempt to eventually reach the megavitamins. If you can manage to make it to the end of the story without losing, you'll also have a special final battle in which you take on the other character after they've eaten the Megavitamins (fighting against Vampire Wario if you're Mario, or against Metal Mario if you're Wario).

FACT

Dr. Mario 64 was featured in the Japanese GameCube compilation Nintendo Puzzle Collection, which also included Yoshi's Cookie and Panel de Pon.

Accompanying the Story mode are a Classic mode (which plays like other versions of Dr.. Mario and simply has you clearing numerous virus-filled stages), a Flash mode (where you have to destroy specific flashing viruses to clear a stage), Score Attack mode (where players are given three minutes to get as high a score as possible) and a Versus mode, where up to four players can compete. Dr. Mario may not have been one of the Nintendo 64's most visually spectacular titles by any stretch of the imagination, but that doesn't detract from the fact that it's one of the most complete versions of an underrated puzzle series. ■

DUAL HEROES

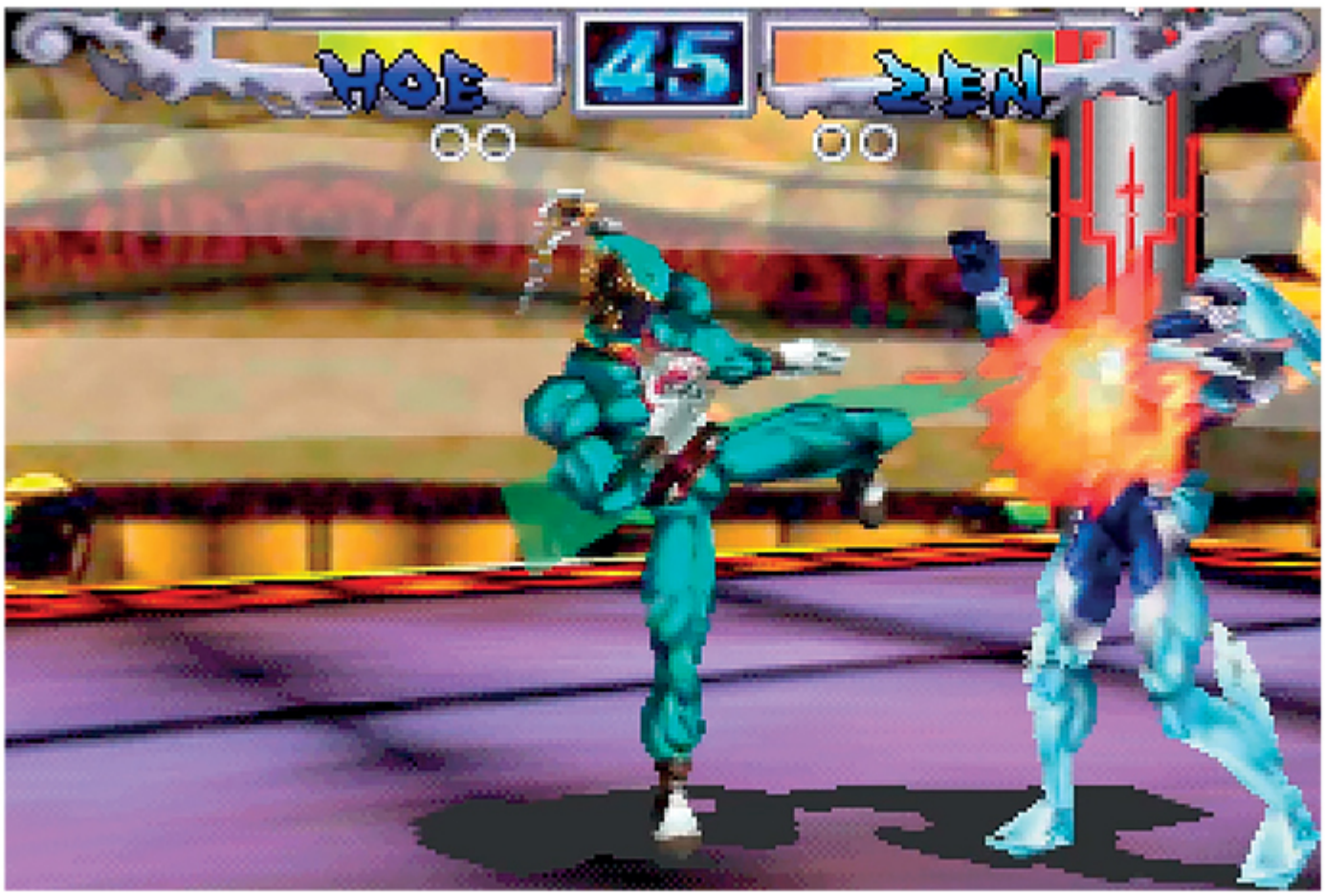
Year 1997
Publisher Electro Brain / Gaga Interactive / Hudson Soft
Developer Produce!

FIGHTING GAMES CAN have convoluted storylines at the best of times, but Dual Heroes has an absolute doozy. To give the full story would require multiple pages, so allow me to attempt to summarise as best I can. As humankind starts a mass evacuation to man-made satellites in space in order to escape the 'Day of Judgement', things go a bit awry when said doomsday happens quite a bit earlier than expected and half the population is stuck on Earth. An enormous earthquake hits the world and an entirely new continent is created in the Pacific Ocean, and by the time 100 years have passed this new continent is the only remaining place for habitable life, as new nations form to rebuild society. As always happens when people are involved, the nations eventually get a bit shirty with each other and war breaks out, but this all comes to a screeching halt when the invading forces of the Zodgierra Empire arrive on Earth, with their evil emperor Zorr taking over the planet. Dual Heroes, then, is a straightforward fighting game where you choose a character and beat up all the rest in order to reach Zorr and slap him around a bit, which basically means all that bumph about the Day of Judgement and earthquakes and war was completely pointless.

As one of the earlier fighting games on the Nintendo 64, Dual Heroes has a fairly limited control system, which is limited to just a Punch button, a Kick button and a Guard button. While the action is generally side-on and locked to a 2D plane like most other fighters of its era, players can also hold down the Z trigger to activate a 'Free 3D Movement' feature where they can run around the stage wherever they like, meaning the game can essentially switch between a 3D and 2D fighter at will. While the combat system itself is nothing to write home about in the grand scheme of things, Dual Heroes' selection of modes is notably more unique. The curious Robot mode lets you train an AI robot by beating it up for an inordinate amount of time. The more you batter your droid, the more it learns your fighting style and the more (in theory, at least) it begins to fight just like you do. You can also take part in an interesting Vs VR mode, where you take on a group of virtual gamers, essentially giving the illusion that you're at an arcade playing Dual Heroes against real opponents. You can choose to either take these virtual players on yourself, or unleash your newly trained AI Robot into the world so it can have at them instead.

FACT

The North American version of the game lets players unlock Zorr (and his transformation Gezorr) as playable fighters, but the EU and Japanese versions don't.



The reaction to Dual Heroes was generally quite negative, with most publications at the time criticising its limited fighting system and its shonky opponent AI. It does deserve marks for trying something different with its game modes, however, and while it didn't quite work out as planned, developer Produce! should at least get points for effort. ■

DUCK DODGERS STARRING DAFFY DUCK

Year	2000
Publisher	Infogrames
Developer	Paradigm Entertainment

IT WOULD PROBABLY have been a safe bet to assume that Donald Duck: Quack Attack had been the only game starring a world-famous cartoon duck to have been released on the Nintendo 64 in the year 2000 by a French publisher. Amazingly, that wasn't the case, and while Ubisoft was courting Disney, Infogrames was instead rubbing shoulders with Warner Brothers, and the result was a 3D platformer starring Daffy Duck in his sci-fi Duck Dodgers alter-ego, The plot revolves around Marvin the Martian, who has finally created the ultimate weapon which will let him destroy the planet Earth and take over the universe. Unfortunately (or fortunately in humanity's case), Marvin soon realises that his weapon needs 100 atoms to power it, and without these atoms his shiny new gizmo is entirely useless. Marvin sends his minions – including some pretty obscure guys like the Arabian guard Hassan from the 1957 Merrie Melodies short *Ali Baba Bunny* – off to collect the atoms for him. Duck Dodgers, learning of his scheme, heads out to try and collect the hundred items before Marvin's heavies can get hold of them.

The game consists of five different planets although, annoyingly, each of them is only given a single-letter name, which makes it hard to tell what their theme is. The first planet, for example, is simply named Planet E, but is a desert world consisting of numerous distinct sections like desert plains, a large underground mine and a palace (which is where the aforementioned Hassan comes into play). Then there's Planet J, which is a city world containing numerous different buildings like a warehouse, a sewer and an arcade. Planet N, meanwhile, is a floating pirate ship, manned by Yosemite Sam (who naturally takes you on in a boss fight). Planet B has your obligatory slippy slidey ice world and finally it's on to Planet X, which takes place on Marvin's home planet and sees Daffy infiltrating his lab to fight a massive robot chicken (which actually looks suspiciously like the Robot Chicken from the Adult Swim TV show of the same name) and eventually take on Marvin himself.

FACT

The game was based on the 1953 animated short *Duck Dodgers in the 24½th Century*, though an animated *Duck Dodgers* TV series followed in 2003.

The game revolves around exploring each of these five planets and collecting atoms along the way. Players have to collect a certain number of atoms in order to unlock the next sections of each world and eventually reach the boss fights. You don't need to collect all 100 to beat the game, but there are two different endings, with an extended one playing if you do manage to get the full 100. When you manage this, Marvin promises he'll never try to blow up Earth, but asks if he's allowed to blow up Jupiter instead. Incredibly, Daffy agrees, saying 'sure, what do I care,' and the fifth planet from the sun is unceremoniously reduced to dust. Um… congratulations, I suppose. ■

DUKE NUKEM 64

Year	1997
Publisher	GT Interactive
Developer	3D Realms / Eurocom

WOLFENSTEIN 3D, DOOM and Quake may have been widely regarded as the most seminal titles in the first-person shooter genre, but id Software wasn't the only studio responsible for making waves in the FPS scene. Texas developer 3D Realms shook up shooters in 1996 when it released Duke Nukem 3D on PC. The game's impressive 3D engine garnered praise, as did the fact that many of its stages were set in more everyday real-world locations (like cinemas and nightclubs) instead of, say, Nazi bases or Hell. By far the most memorable aspect of the game, though – for better or for worse – was its risqué sense of humour. Duke (voiced by John St John) regularly spat out sweary one-liners, while the game was strewn with topless women and the like. At one point players can even go into a strip club and flash money at a stripper, saying 'shake it baby' as she does indeed shake it. Naturally, this wasn't going to even take off – let alone fly – on Nintendo hardware, and so Duke Nukem 64 is a heavily modified port which is impressively faithful in some ways, but clearly different in others.

All 26 stages from the PC version are present in the Nintendo 64 port (plus four hidden ones), but most of them have been tweaked significantly to remove some areas and add some new ones. In the second stage, for example, the adult entertainment store has been replaced by a gun shop and there's a new burger joint called Duke Burger across the road. Duke's dialogue was also completely re-recorded by John St John, with less harsh one-liners. Instead of calling his enemies 'alien bastards', they're now simply 'alien scum'. That's not to say it's a worse version of the game, mind you, it's just a different one. In fact, there are some aspects of the Nintendo 64 game that even improve on its PC sibling. The N64 version includes some new weapons, including dual wielding submachine guns, a grenade launcher and a plasma cannon, and it also allows some guns to have multiple ammo types: for example, you can find rare 'dum-dum' ammo for your pistol which makes it significantly more powerful. While the game's enemies are all still 2D sprites as in the PC version, the final boss – the Cycloid Emperor, who fights you in a stadium – is now a fully polygonal enemy. The game also features a four-player split-screen deathmatch mode, which is something that was extremely finicky to pull off on the PC in the days when LAN parties were the most efficient way of joining players together.

FACT

Just to make it even clearer that the N64 version respects women (slightly) more, each stage now has 'babes' being held captive by aliens, who you have to rescue.

Ultimately, the N64 port of Duke Nukem 3D was an interesting one. Although on paper it seems to remove the core of what the series stands for, in practice it still retains the general action that made it so entertaining in the first place. Indeed, some would argue that the removal of its racier content means it actually holds up a little better these days than the original version does. ■

DUKE NUKEM: ZERO HOUR

Year	1997
Publisher	GT Interactive
Developer	Eurocom

WITH THE DUKE Nukem hype train continuing to chug along, it was decided that the foul-mouthed firearms-favouring filthmonger would continue to appear in more games. Rather than sticking with the first-person perspective that made Duke Nukem 3D and 64 so successful, however, publisher GT Interactive instead decided to go third-person for a pair of games, each focused on time-travel storylines. The PlayStation got Duke Nukem: Time to Kill, which was developed by n-space. Meanwhile, the Nintendo 64 ended up with Duke Nukem: Zero Hour, for which Eurocom took over the reins.

The game opens with Duke and some US marines fighting their way through New York as an alien invasion threatens to take over the city. Duke reaches the Statue of Liberty and discovers that the aliens' real plan is to travel back in time and try to meddle with past events in the hope that it'll make taking over the world a lot easier. Naturally, not having any of this, Duke decides to take them on, and does so by initially travelling forward to a post-apocalyptic New York, where nuclear war has nearly made humans extinct. Duke finds a bunch of resistance fighters, who send him back to the old west where he stops the aliens detonating a bomb in Roswell, then travels to Victorian era London where he encounters Jack the Ripper. Finally, it's back to New York to find the alien mothership and face Zero, the alien overlord. It's safe to say, then, that the plot to this one is a bit more complex than that of its predecessor, and there are more cutscenes and plenty more John St John dialogue to cater for this.

While the gameplay may not immediately be as intuitive as that of the FPS title that made him so famous, it's still relatively easy to control Duke in a third-person perspective. Action is very much the order of the day here and there are 17 different guns to collect throughout the course of Duke's adventures. These include straightforward offerings like the dual Peacekeeper revolvers and a sawn-off shotgun, but eventually get more ridiculous thanks to the likes of the Gamma Cannon (which fires bouncing energy balls) and the Volt Cannon (which zaps Duke's enemies with electricity). There's also a sniper rifle for zoomed-in shots, making it easier to pick off enemies from a distance.

FACT

The sixth stage, Dry Town, is a reference to Nintendo banning any depiction of alcohol in its games. A poster in the level reads: 'Dry Town by order of Sheriff Ted Nindo.'

Zero Hour and its PlayStation counterpart were obviously nowhere near as successful as Duke Nukem 3D and 64 were, but they at least did well enough to justify the PlayStation getting another third-person game, the Time to Kill sequel Duke Nukem: Land of the Babes. Time to Kill was an apt title because these third-person games were arguably killing time until the real sequel, Duke Nukem Forever, was released. Turns out they maybe needed to kill a little more time than expected, because despite development starting in 1997 it would be 14 years until Forever saw the light of day (and was promptly criticised for not being very good). ■

EARTHWORM JIM 3D

Year 1999
Publisher Rockstar Games / Interplay
Developer VIS Interactive

WHEN INTERPLAY ACQUIRED the rights to the Earthworm Jim licence, it was inevitable that a third game in the series was on the way sooner or later. Turns out that would be 'later', because following the release of Earthworm Jim 2 in 1995 the third game would be embroiled in a development nightmare that would see fans waiting four years for the next instalment. For starters, developer Shiny Entertainment (who had created the previous two games) had recently implemented a no-sequel policy, so the keys to the franchise were instead handed over to Scottish studio VIS Entertainment. As was seemingly the law in the late '90s, it was also decided that the third Earthworm Jim wouldn't be a 2D platformer like its predecessors but would move to a polygonal, free-roaming platformer instead, one that borrowed heavily from the likes of Banjo-Kazooie.

The plot is typically bizarre, given the series' style of humour. One day Jim is hit by a flying cow (a staple of the series) and falls into a coma. While on the outside it looks as if there's not much going on, Jim is actually alive and well in his own subconscious. It turns out that his mind has been invaded by the memories of villains he's faced in previous games, so it's up to Jim's super-ego, which has materialised in his mind to fight the infection, to make his way through the four chambers of Jim's mind – Memory, Happiness, Fear and Fantasy – and defeat his old foes again.

While he's doing this he also has to collect the Golden Udders of Lucidity, which are used to unlock each of the four chambers. Each chamber also has its own locked sections and these can be opened by collecting the green marbles dotted around (because he's lost his marbles, you see, it's all very clever). Ultimately, after defeating his former nemeses and cleansing his four chambers, Jim faces his final battle against Earthworm Kim, his feminine side, as he attempts to become his old macho, masculine self again. Look, I didn't make it up.

FACT

If you think the whole 'fighting Earthworm Kim to defeat his feminine side' thing is weird, don't worry: when you beat the game you get to play as Kim and the final boss becomes Jim instead.

By the time the game had been released, the *Earthworm Jim* animated series had been off the air for a couple of years. Nevertheless, Interplay brought in Dan Castellaneta (aka the voice of Homer Simpson) to reprise his role as Jim, making the game feel more like an extension of the cartoon than a sequel to the two 16-bit games. The lengthy development cycle was also a potential sign of some issues behind the scenes, especially given that a lot of pre-release screenshots and footage seen in magazines and websites at the time showed numerous elements that were never in the final game, such as a level set in an oversized house, a scene where Jim is riding his pocket rocket and a snowboarding section.

Earthworm Jim 3D retains a lot of the humour of its predecessors, but (as was the case with many 2D to 3D jumps) fans and critics were generally less satisfied with the gameplay than in Jim's previous adventures. The outcome – a Game Boy Color spin-off and a roster slot in ClayFighter 63⅓ aside – was early retirement for Jim. ■

ECW HARDCORE REVOLUTION

Year	2000
Publisher	Acclaim
Developer	Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City

AFTER WORKING WITH Acclaim for more than 20 years, the WWF (as it was known then) performed a Shawn Michaels-style screwjob and jumped ship to THQ, who had been wowing wrestling fans with its WCW vs nWo titles like World Tour and Revenge (seen later in this book). With WCW moving to EA and THQ now adopting the WWF brand, Acclaim was left without a wrestling promotion with which to continue using the wrestling engine it had used for WWF War Zone and WWF Attitude. This changed when it teamed up with Paul Heyman's upstart wrestling organisation ECW which, while significantly less popular than WWF and WCW, still had a hardcore following (pun always intended).

ECW Hardcore Revolution, then, was the first ECW game developed and published by Acclaim, and naturally it borrowed heavily from Acclaim's existing WWF engine. It included a roster of 33 wrestlers, including such well-known names as Rob Van Dam, Raven, Rhino, Sabu, and Tommy Dreamer. It also featured 10 hidden wrestlers, including: Dreamer's real-life wife Beulah McGillicuddy, who had left a year earlier; Taz, who had just jumped to WWF a couple of months before the game launched; and Louie Spicolli, a good friend of Tommy Dreamer's who had died two years earlier – as well as a bunch of made-up 'jobber' wrestlers. In case it wasn't clear, the game played fast and loose

with rules, and this extended to the modes on offer. As the first wrestling game to receive a Mature rating from the ESRB, Hardcore Revolution had no issues at all with ramping up the violence. Deathmatches garnished the ring and surrounding area with objects that could be used as weapons, while barbed wire matches replaced their ring ropes with a slightly sharper alternative.

The only real issue with the game was that it was still using that Attitude engine, which by this point was already starting to look extremely limited. Character animation was clunky, moves had to be entered with a series of Mortal Kombat-like button combinations and wrestler entrances involved awkward scenes where each grappler stumbled into the ring like a drunk at a wedding heading to the free bar. This was bad enough on the PlayStation, but on the N64 – where THQ was churning out smash hits with its AKI-developed engine – the ECW game looked practically archaic by comparison. For many fans, though, the fact an ECW game even existed was good enough, and the game certainly wasn't shy about standing up to the competition. Take Joey Styles, who's the game's commentator but can also be unlocked as a playable character. Every wrestler has their own taunts and some of Styles's one-liners are quite bold, from 'I'd like to see [WCW announcer] Tony Schiavone try this' to 'I'm gonna beat on you like Acclaim Sports beats on THQ and EA Entertainment'. Despite taking a critical mauling, something must have gone right somewhere, because Hardcore Revolution was deemed successful enough to spawn a second game, ECW Anarchy Rulz, which came to the PlayStation and Dreamcast just six months later. ■

FACT

According to commentary files found in the game, Angelica was going to be a playable character at one point. She was presumably removed when she jumped to WWF and became Lita.

ELMO'S LETTER ADVENTURE

Year	1999
Publisher	NewKidCo
Developer	Realtime Associates

YOU CAN COUNT the number of educational games on the Nintendo 64 on one mitten, and they're both on this page. The first was Elmo's Letter Adventure, a wholesome slice of 'edutainment' starring everyone's favourite red monster child (a hotly contested category). As the name suggests, the focus here is on teaching young children to identify the letters of the alphabet. They do this by exploring six different levels, which are located via a hub area which, naturally, is Sesame Street itself. Elmo can talk to three different Sesame Street residents, each of whom represents two different stages. Big Bird sends players to a vegetable garden and an apple orchard, Grover takes them to an alphabet planet and a flight in outer space, while Ernie brings them underwater in stages called Aqua Shoot and Mermaid Manor. When each stage starts the player is given a letter they need to find: they then have to explore the stage (with either the Control Stick or the D-Pad) and hunt through all the letters lying around in search of the specific one they've been asked to get. Once a letter is found a certain number of times the stage is cleared. Elmo's Letter Adventure is a harmless enough title, and the game features real voice acting from the performers on the show so kids no doubt got a kick out of exploring each level and finding all the letters (in both upper and lower case, no less: there's no messing around here). ■

FACT

It took years for Elmo's character to develop. He was a speaking character from the late '70s and the cast would sometimes pick him up and try to give him a personality, but it wasn't until Kevin Clash tried in 1984 that it properly clicked.

ELMO'S NUMBER JOURNEY

Year	1999
Publisher	NewKidCo
Developer	Realtime Associates

PICTURE THE SCENE: you're at a shop trying to buy a copy of Elmo's Letter Adventure, when you suddenly realise you can't pay for it because you have no idea how numbers work. How to get out of this frankly embarrassing scenario? Simple: buy a copy of Elmo's Number Journey too (or, rather, have someone else buy you one). At its core, it's exactly the same idea as Letter Adventure except it switches letters for numerals and has different characters and stages. This time you'll be meeting Cookie Monster as he takes you to Chocolate River and Sugar Mountain, heading with Ernie to the carnival where you check out the Dunking Booths and Bumper cars and – given that the game was practically made for him – visiting the Count's castle and its garden maze. As with Letter Adventure the aim is to explore each area until you've collected enough of the numbers, but this time there's a slight twist in that, in higher difficulty levels, sometimes the numerals are replaced with stacks of objects. Say the number you need is 8, for example: this means players are looking for numeral 8s, but if they come across a stack of eight balls then it would count too. Anyone armed with both Letter Adventure and Number Journey were ready to take on the world, with no problem too tough to handle. That is, as long as those problems didn't involve forming words or counting to double digits. Then they'd struggle. ■

FACT

Since we're talking about counting, Cookie Monster is the only main Sesame Street character to have five fingers instead of four. Kermit does too, but he only had a recurring guest role on the show.

EXCITEBIKE 64

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Left Field Productions

IT'S SOMEWHAT ODD that Excitebike 64 isn't always rhymed off along with all the others when people list the Nintendo 64 games published by Nintendo itself. It's not clear if this is because it was released near the end of the system's life or because it wasn't developed by Nintendo itself, but whatever the reason the game deserves a lot more credit than it usually gets. As a polygonal follow-up to the 1984 NES game Excitebike, this 64-bit sequel completely ditches its predecessor's side-on viewpoint for an over-the-shoulder 3D view similar to that of most other racing games of the polygonal era. It's also a 'proper' racing game with realistic handling, whereas the NES game mainly involved shifting sideways to different lanes rather than properly turning round corners.

Despite its change of camera angle and handling system, however, Excitebike 64 does still share a couple of major gameplay mechanics with the original game. Most notable of these is the game's emphasis on landing jumps properly. Each of the game's circuits are littered with jumps, and simply taping down the accelerator and ploughing into them isn't going to win you first place. Instead, each jump has to be approached at the right speed so the player doesn't land halfway up the next one, and on top of this the player also has to lean forwards or backwards in mid-air to make sure the wheels line up with the ground upon landing. The other main parallel to the first Excitebike is

the addition of a temperature gauge, which usually rests at slightly above half. A turbo button lets you increase your acceleration and top speed at any time, but when you use it your bike's temperature raises in the process, meaning overuse can result in you overheating. Experts, then, can use the turbo (sparingly) to get extra oomph up certain large jumps and leap over entire subsequent jumps altogether.

There are a total of 28 tracks in the game in total, which are divided into indoor arena circuits and outdoor cross-country ones. The indoor ones are all your typical motocross-type affairs, but it's the outdoor ones that mix things up substantially, providing a nice variety of course designs and even the odd hidden shortcut dotted here or there. Despite its clear penchant for huge jumps, though, Excitebike 64 is anything but an arcade style racer. The game's Tutorial mode is practically essential for beginners, as it helps players get to grips with its sensitive physics and its unforgiving handling (there's a powerslide move that's all but necessary for some turns). Sticking with the tutorial will also see you being rewarded with the actual NES version as an unlockable extra. In fact, that isn't where the game's acknowledgment of its roots ends: win the Challenge Round of the Pro Season and you'll unlock Excitebike 3D, which takes the tracks from the NES game and replicates them in the Excitebike 64 engine so you can race them in the new third-person polygonal style. ■

FACT

Excitebike 64 also has a brilliant Desert mode, where players are dumped in a procedurally generated desert full of sand dunes and have to find and put out 10 fires before their competitors do.

EXTREME-G

Year 1997
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Probe Entertainment

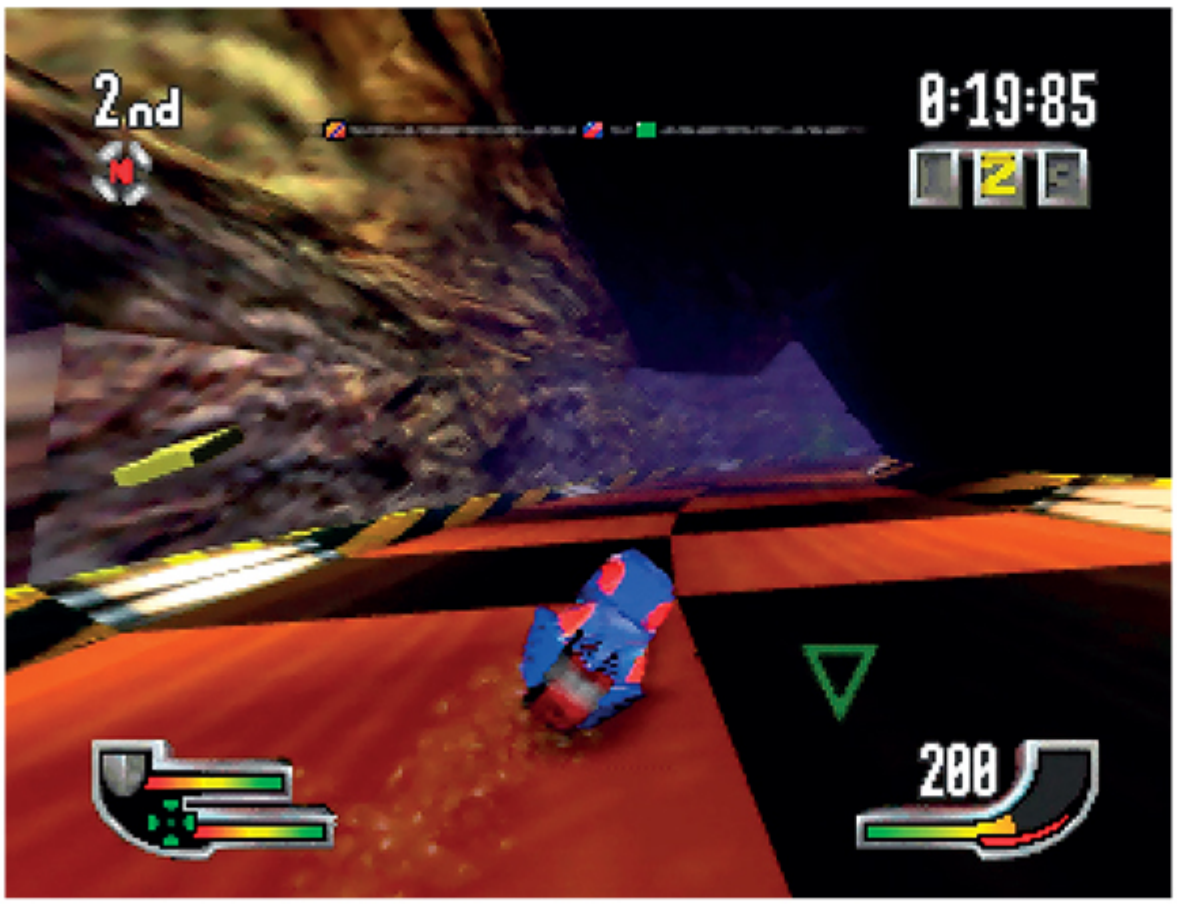
IT'S IMPORTANT TO know that Extreme-G was released around a year before F-Zero X arrived on the Nintendo 64. These days it's easy to look at the console's full library and point out Nintendo's game as the definitive futuristic racer, but for a period Extreme-G was the best alternative N64 fans had to the PlayStation's Wipeout series. Despite it not boasting the solid 60 frames per second performance of F-Zero X, anyone playing Extreme-G for the first time today may still be impressed at how well it holds up.

The game has a slightly offbeat plot that sadly isn't referenced beyond the manual. It's set in the future, where humankind has left the Earth behind and moved to the New World where all their dreams can be fulfilled. Getting everything you want can be quite boring, though, and some citizens have been showing signs that they'd like to maybe head out and cause a little chaos, purely so they can have some challenge in their lives again. Wary of a potential kerfuffle kicking off, the government comes up with an idea to 'stimulate the minds and increase the competitive spirit of the people of the world'. That idea is Extreme-G, a series of obscenely high-speed races with futuristic motorbikes. And even better, it's all perfectly safe, because the tracks are set in the previously abandoned worlds whose resources had been used up, and all the racers are controlling their vehicles remotely from home (which is a bit meta).

Because there's no immediate danger to the racer, you're free to swing your big turbo-charged future-bikes all over the place in Extreme-G. Although they reach extremely high speeds, they're comparatively easy to handle, and players can hold the R button for a sharper turn when necessary. You also have three nitro boosts, which increase your speed even further to near-comical levels. The main single-player mode is Extreme Contest, which consists of three separate tournaments: Atomic (which has four races), Critical Mass (eight races) and Meltdown (12 races). Technically they play like Grand Prix modes in other racing games, where you earn points for each win, but Extreme-G makes things far harsher by giving you a minimum finishing position in each race. If you don't finish within that position, it's an instant Game Over, so there's no room for a single bad race. This can naturally be quite stressful, so there's also a bonus mode called Shoot 'Em Up where each track is populated by racing droids and you have to shoot down as many as possible within three laps.

FACT

At the time of writing, the fastest motorcycle in the world is the Dodge Tomahawk, which can hit speeds of 420mph. That's actually faster than the bikes in Extreme-G, which hit around 320mph when a nitro boost is applied.



In a world before F-Zero X brought silky smooth futuristic racing to the N64 at 60 frames per second, Extreme-G was critically acclaimed for its detailed tracks (despite its over-use of fog) and the speed of its bikes. There was still room for improvement, most notably in terms of how the game handled its combat and helped players differentiate each weapon, but that improvement was to come the following year. ■

EXTREME-G 2

Year	1998
Publisher	Acclaim
Developer	Probe Entertainment

EXTREME-G WAS ALL well and good, but who cares about racing futuristic bikes at obscene speeds when there aren't even any people in them? After all, there's no thrill in a dangerous race if there's no actual danger involved, other than to the big slabs of metal being remotely slung around the tracks. Twenty-five years have passed since the events of the first game, and the citizens of the New United Planets have become bored with the Extreme-G sport in general. So, a small gathering of fans decide to start holding actual illegal real life Extreme-G races, with their own homemade bikes. Eventually this new underground version of the sport takes off and when a few people die taking part the public starts to take notice: finally, the danger they were looking for. Instead of campaigning to outlaw this dangerous new hobby, the media instead decides to start covering it, attracting sponsors whose money helps the competitors make new bikes that are even faster than the ones that used to be controlled remotely. Finally, the military realises it can get some cheap weapons research out of this, so it lets the racers attach their prototype weaponry to their bikes and offers to create a number of specially designed Extreme-G tracks in return.

This needless story basically boils down to the fact that Extreme-G 2 has more or less the same concept as the first game, other than the fact that there are actually people in the bikes this time. The general look and feel is similar to that

of its predecessor, though it's received a visual upgrade. The Extreme Contest mode returns and has a similar structure, telling players which position they need to beat in order to reach the next race. Even the Shoot 'Em Up mode is back too, though this time it's been renamed Arcade. The most obvious improvement, however, is the way the game handles weaponry.

While the previous Extreme-G also allowed players to pick up a series of weapons-based power-ups that were dotted around each track, the icons representing these weapons were pretty nondescript and it was often difficult to know what you'd just collected until you actually activated the thing to see what it was. This was far from ideal, so Extreme-G shakes that up by adding an announcer to the game. Every time you collect a weapon, she says its name, making it much clearer what had just been picked up. It may be a minor improvement in the grand scheme of things, but with a game this fast you don't need to be wasting time trying to remember if your new weapon fires forwards or has to be dropped behind you.

This was to be the last Extreme-G game for the Nintendo 64, but the series lasted a little longer, continuing to the next generation. XGIII: Extreme-G Racing came to the PS2 and GameCube in 2001 while the final game, XGRA, was released on PS2, GameCube and Xbox a couple of years later. Both played similarly to the N64 games, but naturally looked better. ■

FACT

In case the influence for the bike's design wasn't clear, entering your name as NEUTRON turns the tracks into Tron-like grids.

F-ZERO X

Year	1998
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo EAD

EXTREME-G MAY HAVE been an entertaining enough game, but even when it was released Nintendo 64 owners were already aware that a sequel to F-Zero was on the way. Indeed, some magazines even said (rather unfairly) that Extreme-G would serve as an appetiser to keep players busy until Nintendo's main course arrived. When F-Zero X finally showed up in late 1998, it completely redefined what some thought was possible on the N64, especially in terms of frame rate. It was unthinkable that a game this fast could also run smoothly, but with clever use of low-poly tracks and cars Nintendo was able to pull off 60 frames per second, something even most slow-paced games on the system could come nowhere near.

As a follow-up to the original SNES F-Zero, X has a similar visual design: players race their futuristic high-speed hovercar on a series of tracks floating miles in the air. If you fall off your track you'll plummet to your doom and explode. It's not identical to the SNES game, however: not only are there now a staggering 30 cars per race (versus 20 in its predecessor), the game's boost system is far more interesting than the first game, which simply gave the player a single boost after each lap. Instead, once you finish the first lap, your car's boost power is activated, and can be activated as many times as you like. The catch is that every boost depletes some of your shield, which adds an interesting risk/reward system to proceedings. Skilled players can boost more frequently and drain their shield until it's nearly empty, while those less confident in their abilities can be more reserved with their boosts and save some of their shield aside for moments where they'll crash into a barrier.

Players initially have access to six cars and their drivers, including series stalwart Captain Falcon and his Blue Falcon vehicle. Over time, they can unlock more characters until the full roster of 30 vehicles is available to choose from. There are 24 tracks in the games, split into four different cups: Jack, Queen King and Joker. If you manage to beat the Joker Cup on Expert difficulty, however, you'll then unlock the ground-breaking X Cup, which generates completely random tracks every time you play it. If the racing side of things isn't dangerous enough there's also a Death Race mode, where you have to take out the other 29 racers as quickly as possible by slamming into them.

F-Zero X was a momentous game, and while the SNES title was notable for being the first real example of the 16-bit console's Mode 7 trickery, the Nintendo 64 version took it to a new level by replacing its flat tracks with elaborate circuits with huge hills, loops and corkscrews. It would be quite some time before another racing game could offer such blistering high speeds at such a smooth frame rate, with such a large number of cars on the track. ■

FACT

One of the racers is James McCloud, whose outfit and vehicle are similar to those of Fox McCloud from Star Fox (whose father was also called James). When you win a cup with him he says: 'I drive like a sly fox!'

F1 POLE POSITION 64

Year 1997
Publisher Ubisoft / Human Entertainment
Developer Human Entertainment

JAPANESE DEVELOPER HUMAN Entertainment had already established itself as a specialist in Formula 1 games by the time F1 Pole Position 64 was released. In fact, this was actually the fifth game in the Human Grand Prix series, with the previous four being released on the Super Famicom (the first two were released in the west as F1 Pole Position 1 and 2: see the *SNES Encyclopedia*). As it would turn out, the series' first step onto N64 territory would turn out to be its last, and this would be Human's final F1 hurrah.

Although the Japanese version of the game – known as Human Grand Prix: The New Generation – doesn't feature any official F1 licensing, it does its best to dance as close to the edge as possible by featuring all the official racers' photos and simply replacing some of the letters in their names, as well as adding a Name Edit feature which lets you correct them to the real thing. The western release is far less legally dubious, as it features the full FIA Formula One licence, meaning the likes of Eddie Irvine, Jean Alesi and Gerhard Berger are all there in their glory. Well, almost all of them: Jacques Villeneuve is instead known as Driver-X, due to rights issues (although his photo is still there, because why not). If none of the real drivers appeal to you, there are also eight 'generic' racers called Driver 1–8 who you can swap in instead, though Driver 2 is clearly Ralf Schumacher, in that his nationality and date of birth are the same. Oh, and you know, his actual photo is there too.

The game is based on the 1996 Formula 1 season and features every track from that year's competition, starting in Australia and ending in Japan. Despite the official branding, it's not actually possible to play full-length F1 races in the Grand Prix mode. Instead, players are limited to 10-lap races, although there's a cheat which lets them bump this up to 30. As well as the main Grand Prix mode, which has you choosing one of the drivers and taking on each of the races in the right order, there's also a mode called Battle, which is essentially a glorified Single Race mode with a few extra features. After choosing your driver you can then choose which of the others will join you on your race. That means if you want a full grid then that's fine, but if you happen to be a big Michael Schumacher fan who hates Damon Hill for some obscure reason, then you can just put them both on the track and have a one-on-one race.

F1 Pole Position 64 was mainly criticised by the media mostly because of its low draw distances, which led to scenery popping in as you approached it (although, in fairness, the Japanese version was much worse for this and it was improved before the game was released in the west). In hindsight, that reception was possibly a tad harsh, because the game remains perfectly playable all these years later. ■

FACT

In the Japanese version, the eight extra drivers are all real racers (with tweaked names but real photos): Takagi, Ralf Schumacher, Prost, Mansell, Suzuki, Nakajima, Senna and Piquet.

F1 RACING CHAMPIONSHIP

Year	2000
Publisher	Video System
Developer	Ubisoft

UBISOFT'S N64 TITLE Racing Simulation: Monaco Grand Prix was met with favourable reviews, but it was sorely lacking in official licences (especially when you consider how many other F1 games there were on the N64 by that point). To address this, Ubisoft teamed up with publisher Video System and acquired the full F1 licence for its follow-up, F1 Racing Championship. The game itself has the sort of structure you'd expect from all other officially licensed F1 games. It follows the events of the 1999 F1 World Championship (which was won by Mika Häkkinen by just two points), with all 22 drivers and 16 tracks available, including the new Malaysian Grand Prix at Sepang.

There are two interesting modes added to F1 Racing Championship that set it somewhat apart from other F1 racing games, the first being a Training mode. This by itself is no big novelty, as many other F1 titles include some sort of tutorial, but in this game the player drives a special car that can change colours depending on the situation. When you're speeding along and all is well your car will glow white, but any time you approach a turn and need to slow down, the car will turn red to let you know it's time to slam on the brakes. Naturally, chameleon technology didn't exist in the 1999 F1 Season so this feature is limited to the Training mode, but it's an interesting way to help players get a feel for when they should be slowing down during each track's more notorious turns. The idea is then obviously that once they start playing the proper Grand Prix mode they'll take their learnings from Training and brake at the appropriate moments without needing to drive a mood ring on wheels.

FACT

Although the game technically wasn't released in North America, a very limited number of NTSC copies were released in Brazil and will run on an American system.

The other unique feature is Arcade mode, which does what it says on the tin. Each race puts you at the back of the grid, and your aim is obviously to get to 1st place within a set number of laps, but the added twist is the timer that's been added. A number of checkpoint gates have been added to each track, and in true coin-op fashion any time you pass one the timer is topped up a bit, so the aim is to not only win the race but do so while performing consistently well so as not to run out of time before you reach the end.

One thing F1 Racing Championship offers that other N64 games don't is the presence of Jacques Villeneuve, the tricky Canadian racer who managed to avoid appearing in other F1 titles because of licensing reasons. Villeneuve fans, then, would be happy to see him finally appearing in this one, but it was perhaps a bit too late by this point because his 1999 season (as part of the new British American Racing team) was disastrous: he failed to even qualify for 12 of the 16 races, and couldn't finish better than eighth in the others. Still, it's a good game, is what I'm saying. ■

F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX

Year 1998
Publisher Video System
Developer Paradigm Entertainment

IN CASE IT wasn't already clear from the last few pages, the Nintendo 64 has a disproportionately healthy number of Formula One racing games to choose from. While none of them are particularly bad and there's enjoyment to be found no matter which one you decide to opt for, it's generally agreed that F1 World Grand Prix and its sequel are the most faithful and realistic depictions of the sport, and the best option for those who take their F1 seriously. The first game is based on the 1997 Formula One season and includes all 17 circuits, including Austria (which returned for the first time in nine years), Luxembourg (making its debut) and the final race in Jerez which replaced the originally planned Portuguese one (after the track's owners didn't make requested changes).

Awkwardly, although Jacques Villeneuve won the 1997 season by a country mile (with 81 points, ahead of Frentzen with only 42), he's the only real-life driver not featured in the game because, as in F1 Pole Position 64, licensing reasons meant his name couldn't be included. Instead he appears as Driver WILLIAMS, though his name can be edited to whatever you like. Handily, this also leads to most of the game's cheats, as changing his name to specific things can unlock goodies. Edit it to Driver VACATION, for example, and you'll unlock a bonus 18th track set in Hawaii. All the rest of the official racers and teams are in there, with the exception of MasterCard Lola because they didn't actually compete in a single race. Naturally, there's a main Grand Prix season, which lets you compete in all 17 races in the 1997 season order. One particularly interesting feature, however, is an option called '97 Events'. If you turn this on, each race will accurately re-enact the events of that actual race in the 1997 season, meaning the qualification times are the same, the weather changes are accurate and AI-controlled racers will retire from a race when they did in real life.

FACT

More cheats? Why, of course. If you change Driver WILLIAMS' name to CHROME or PYRITE, you'll unlock shiny silver and gold drivers. Be careful though, because they hit speeds of well over 300mph.

Further pushing the game's desire for authenticity is a Challenge mode, which gives the player 15 scenarios split into three categories: Offence (where you have to increase your position), Defence (where you have to block other cars and maintain your position) and Trouble (where the likes of car damage or wet weather have to be overcome). Again, these are all based on actual events from the 1997 season and each opens with an endearingly detailed description of the situation. The first, for example, explains how Goodyear's new super-soft tyres improved lap times but also wore down quickly. As Olivier Panis, you have to take advantage of your sturdier Bridgestone tyres to catch up on other racers as they pull in for pit-stops you don't need. F1 World Grand Prix was warmly received, with many publications pointing out that players had to put the time in to learn the game's more realistic handling before the results would pay off. ■

F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX II

Year 1999
Publisher Video System
Developer Paradigm Entertainment

ONE OF THE tiny handful of Nintendo 64 games exclusive to Europe, the sequel to F1 World Grand Prix II built on its predecessor in subtle ways. The most notable addition was a new tutorial mode, which let players drive through any of the tracks while the game gives you advice on how to handle certain turns and other sections of the track. Performance has also been improved with a slightly better frame rate, and if you have an Expansion Pak plugged into your console you'll be able to watch full race replays from a variety of TV style angles. Naturally, while the previous game was based on the full events of the 1997 F1 season, this time around it's the 1998 season you'll be taking on, and as before there's an option to turn on the real-life events of that season to ensure drivers crash out when they're supposed to. This does actually result in less game for your money, though it's really no fault of the developer because the 1998 season only consisted of 16 races, with the Jerez track dropped from the schedule, which means the Grand Prix mode is one race shorter this time. That said, with a new set of Challenges and the same impressively accurate attention to detail, players and press were still very much in favour of this sequel and it remains a great racing game, and one that's reasonably cheap to find despite the increased attention its PAL exclusivity earns it from American collectors. ■

FACT

If you really do want that Jerez track, you're in luck. Change Driver WILLIAMS' name to Driver NOSTALGIA and you'll unlock it in the game.

FIFA SOCCER 64

Year 1997
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Canada

ALTHOUGH EA'S FIFA series was already a huge success in the 16-bit era, players who knew their stuff preferred the gameplay of Konami's International Superstar Soccer games. By the time FIFA made the jump to the Nintendo 64 numerous magazines were already making rumblings about the upcoming ISS 64 being pretty revolutionary, so EA had to make an impact. Unfortunately, it did, but perhaps not in the way it expected. The game was heavily criticised for its clunky animations and unresponsive controls, a far cry from the critical acclaim the old isometric SNES games received. Still, it did have one advantage over the competition: the inclusion of real team and player names. As well as 64 international teams (appropriately), the game also included five domestic leagues – England, Italy, France, Germany and the USA – bringing the total to 160 teams. Sadly, this wasn't considered good enough and the game's review scores ranged from average to low, with *N64 Magazine* in particular giving it 39 per cent and declaring that 'the more you play, the more you realise how thoroughly dreadful things are'. Most of the criticism was aimed at the game's goalkeepers, who regularly allowed shots to go through their legs and would happily watch shots go past them at head height. Its PIP camera feature, which adds a second screen showing the action from a different angle, was also criticised for being far too large and generally pointless. Thankfully, the series wasn't completely beyond saving and EA quickly turned things around, as you'll see later. ■

FACT

Canadians may be a little peeved to find that the league simply named 'USA' has the likes of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal in it.

FIFA 98: ROAD TO WORLD CUP

Year 1997
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Canada

EA HAD ALREADY been making plans to stop supporting the Nintendo 64 with future sports games, but FIFA 64 received significantly more pre-orders than expected so it decided to keep going. It may have been a bit rubbish, then, but at least it allowed its significantly better successor to come to Nintendo's system too. FIFA 98 contained 11 leagues – England, Italy, Brazil, France, Spain, Netherlands, USA, Germany, Sweden, Scotland and Malaysia – for a combined total of 192 club teams, all with real player names. Perhaps more impressively, however, it also included the titular Road to World Cup 98 mode, in which players could choose any of the national teams taking part in the qualification process for World Cup France 98 and try to help them qualify for the main tournament. The word 'any' is the operative one in that last sentence: a whopping 172 countries are represented and fully playable in the game, from the more obvious offerings like Spain, Italy and France, to footballing minnows like Turkmenistan, Mozambique and St Lucia. This was all accompanied by a drastically revamped game engine, which was widely acclaimed as a positive step forward in the series' development thanks to its more effective tackling system, its fun sprint mechanic (where you can control your player's speed by how quickly you tap the button) and its improved graphics. And to think, Nintendo 64 fans would have completely missed out on it had they not all bought FIFA 64 in their droves. ■

FACT

The game's intro is considered the greatest in FIFA history, thanks to the presence of 'Song 2' by Blur. Cartridge size issues mean the N64 version doesn't include the full song, despite it only being two minutes long.

FIFA 99

Year 1998
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Canada

BECAUSE FIFA 98 was so well received, the following year's instalment didn't make too many changes to the actual gameplay. You could now slide to hit crosses along the ground, goalkeepers could be controlled manually to an extent, there were different animations for trapping the ball and players' heads would now turn to look at the ball when it was in the air. Hardly redefining the genre. The main improvements, then, took place off the pitch with the addition of new leagues and modes. The Malaysian league finally bid farewell to the series, and in its place were two new leagues: Belgium and Portugal. A new section called Rest of Europe was also added, allowing EA to add 50 extra club teams from other European countries (such as Panathinaikos, Spartak Moscow and Galatasaray) without having to include their entire leagues. Also added was a new European Dream League Mode, which took 20 of the best teams from around Europe and put them together in one big tournament: AC Milan, Arsenal, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Benfica, Brondby, Dortmund, Dynamo Kiev, Feyenoord, Galatasaray, Göteborg, Rosenborg, Inter Milan, Juventus, Liverpool, Manchester United, Monaco, Paris St Germain, Rangers and Real Madrid. It wasn't all good news, however: the indoor mode from FIFA 98 was removed, and because there was no longer any World Cup qualification, the number of international teams was drastically cut from 172 down to 50 (sorry, Belize fans). Still, the quality of the gameplay continued to shine through and the general reception to FIFA 99 was still positive. ■

FACT

The introduction of the Portuguese league led to a complaint from FutePro, which owned the licensing rights to Portuguese teams. PlayStation game Actua Soccer 3 was pulled from Portuguese shops for the same reason but FIFA wasn't, so presumably an agreement was reached.

FIGHTERS DESTINY

Year	1998
Publisher	Ocean / Infogrames / Imagineer
Developer	Genki

FIGHTERS DESTINY OFFERS an interesting twist on the fighting genre, and I don't just mean its decision not to put an apostrophe in its title. Rather than opting for the typical best-off-three system that almost every one-on-one fighting game sports, Fighters Destiny instead offers a points-based system that makes it feel more like the sort of martial arts competition you'd maybe see at the Olympics. Except one of the characters is dressed like a clown.

Players are awarded different points values for different actions. These values can be changed in the Options screen, but allow me to run through the default scoring. If you manage to knock your opponent off the arena and get a Ring Out, you'll be awarded one point. Two points are given for successfully performing a throw move (though these can be reversed if the opponent reacts quickly enough). Two points are also given for 'lock skills', which are basically submission-type holds where both players start bashing buttons to either execute or escape them. A healthy three points are handed out if you can perform a special move that knocks your opponent down with one hit, or for performing a counter attack powerful enough to knock the other fighter onto their backside. And if you're somehow able to pull off your character's most powerful move and strike your opponent with it, you'll get four points. Finally, if nobody manages to score within 30 seconds, a judge will award one point to whoever they thought was the best performer. The first fighter to score seven points is the winner, meaning there's an interesting risk/reward strategy in play. If you're trailing behind, do you try to slowly work your way back with Ring Outs and throws, or do you gamble with your special moves (which are easier to avoid) in an attempt to claim a lot of points in one go?

FACT

The game's main Ryu-like character was originally named Saeki in pre-release versions of the game, but was eventually changed to Ryuji, just in case it wasn't obvious enough.

As well as a standard Vs CPU mode, which plays like the typical Arcade mode you'd expect in most fighting games (fight through all the other characters until you reach the boss), there's also a special Master Challenge mode. Here you spin a roulette wheel to face either the Master or Joker. If you fight and defeat Master, you'll gain a new special move (up to eight per character), and will then have to decide whether to save those moves and quit, or spin the wheel again. If the wheel lands on Joker, however, there are no moves on offer: instead, losing to him removes all the special moves you've accumulated, leaving you to curse yourself for not saving earlier. Although the actual fighting system is quite limited – there are only two attack buttons, with B hitting high and A hitting low – the unique scoring system makes Fighters Destiny a game worth checking out if you fancy something a little different from the more run-of-the-mill fighting fare. ■

FIGHTER DESTINY 2

Year 1999
Publisher SouthPeak Interactive / Imagineer
Developer Genki

I DON'T KNOW what it is with this series and weird titles, but someone clearly got bored with the 'S' in Fighters Destiny and dropped it for the sequel. Fighter Destiny 2 is similar in many ways to its predecessor, but adds some new features and freshens up the roster a bit to try to make things feel a little different. Some of the characters from the previous game return here too: Ryu knock-off Ryuji is back, for example, but he's been given his original beta name of Saeki. Other characters, meanwhile, have been ditched in favour of new fighters who, despite their new appearance, are essentially clones of the characters they replace.

As an example, the first game had a character called Leon, who was supposed to be Spanish but fought in Italy for some reason. He's been replaced with Frederico, an actual Italian fighter who has a similar moveset. Meanwhile, there's a massive purple guy called Ziege who looks similar to Drax from the Guardians of the Galaxy, who appears to have replaced the similarly massive (but more culturally problematic) Native American character Tomahawk. Speaking of questionable cultural stereotypes, each fighter speaks a lot more in the sequel, which is particularly problematic for Abdul, who the game states is Mongolian but has clearly become some sort of parody Muslim, right down to him shouting 'save me, Allah' when you knock him off the stage. I wish I was making this up.

Interestingly, it's actually a different character who someone decided had a voice that could offend some players: replacing Joker from the original game is a drag queen called Cherry. In the Japanese version of the game, Cherry has a deeper, 'masculine' voice, but this was changed to a more high-pitched, traditionally 'feminine' voice in the west despite having no changes to their physical design. Cherry is part of the Fighter's Arena, the game's new mode which replaces the Master Challenge from the original Fighters Destiny. It's a strange board game thing where players spin a wheel then move forward a certain number of spaces on a giant board. If you land on a normal square you'll face off against one of the other standard characters in the game, and will earn stat boosts if you can beat them. The Master appears at certain checkpoints along the way and will give you a new move if you can defeat him, and Cherry – playing the Joker role – will take moves off you should they beat you. While it's an inventive new mode for a game already known for its innovative fighting system (which remains unchanged this time, incidentally), some argued that it was perhaps a little slow-paced and padded out compared to the excitement of the Master Challenge mode. As such, Fighter Destiny 2 is one of those rare examples where the sequel isn't quite as entertaining, meaning the original game may be the more solid package and the one to check out. ■

FACT

The missing apostrophe and missing 's' in each title may be annoying, but it could have been worse: early previews for the original Fighters Destiny gave the working title as Struggle Hard.

FIGHTING FORCE 64

Year 1999
Publisher Crave Entertainment
Developer Core Design

FIGHTING FORCE WAS originally released on the Sony PlayStation in 1997, and its publisher Eidos was supposed to release the Nintendo 64 version the following year (even showing it off at the 1998 E3 Expo). At one point, however, Eidos decided to abandon all Nintendo 64 projects entirely, and it looked like Fighting Force was headed for the trash, until Crave Entertainment stepped in and took over publishing duties. The result was Fighting Force 64 which, despite the name potentially suggesting otherwise, is just a straight port of the PlayStation game, albeit released two years later.

The game's plot revolves around Dr Dex Zeng, a megalomaniacal scientist who believes that when the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve 1999 and the new millennium begins, the world will end (hey, don't laugh, kids, we all thought that). Zeng prepares for the impending apocalypse, but when it doesn't happen he's absolutely furious that all his plans have gone to waste. Instead of thinking 'well, I lost a lot of money but at least everyone's alive', Zeng goes in the completely opposite direction, deciding that it's up to him to make sure the world *does* end, and sets about planning to destroy it. One of Zeng's scientists decides this might be taking things a tad too far and makes a few phone calls, and so the Fighting Force, a group of combat specialists, get together to kick Zeng's head in. Or, as the manual puts it, 'it's time to end the end of the world'.

There are four playable characters to choose from in Fighting Force 64. Mace Daniels is a private investigator who the manual claims is 'one hot woman with a taste for blood as well as desire'. But hey, if you're worried that she's being sexualised, it's okay! It also says: 'Mace is a woman aware of her sexual magnetism, yet she couldn't care less about men.' Phew, that's a relief. Probably. Joining her is Hawk Manson, your typical hunky hero who used to be a freedom fighter but is now a vigilante. Then there's Ben 'Smasher' Jackson, a giant meathead with a low IQ who's serving multiple life sentences but is 'rented out' to Hawk by the prison. Finally, there's Alana McKendrick, a 17-year-old raver who's Zeng's illegitimate daughter. So, yeah.

FACT

Core had originally pitched Fighting Force to Sega as a potential Streets of Rage 4, but Sega declined, claiming it had its own plans. Streets of Rage ultimately wouldn't return until 2020.

The game is your standard beat 'em up similar to games like Streets of Rage and Final Fight, with each character boasting their own unique fighting style. Smasher is perhaps the most entertaining fighter to play as, because he has the ability to pick up large items as weapons. Smash a car, for example, and the other characters can pick up its wheels to throw at enemies, but Smasher can pick up the entire engine. While Fighting Force 64 has slightly improved visuals compared to the PlayStation version released two years earlier, it also regularly suffers from slowdown not seen in Sony's console. Neither version is particularly better as a result. ■

FLYING DRAGON

Year	1997
Publisher	Natsume / Culture Brain
Developer	Culture Brain

MANY FIGHTING GAMES include some sort of gimmick to try to stand out from the crowd (as you'll have just seen with Fighters Destiny's points-based system, if you've been reading this book in order). Flying Dragon's gimmick is a bit of a doozy, in that it actually offers two games in one. It's actually the 13th game in the Hiryu no Ken (Fist of the Flying Dragon) series, of which only a few had previously made it to the west including Flying Dragon and Flying Warriors on the NES, and Ultimate Fighter on the SNES. While previous games in the series had dabbled in 'SD' (super deformed, aka chibi) and more realistic art styles, Flying Dragon is the gaming equivalent of that animated gif of the girl asking 'why not have both?'. The main menu, then, presents you with two options: SD Hiryu and Virtual Hiryu.

SD Hiryu is a more cartoonish fighting game where each of the playable characters has short bodies and big heads. You'd be forgiven for thinking it's the mode the developers had more fun with because it's the most feature-packed of the two styles on offer. Its main Circuit mode has you fighting a series of opponents and boss fighters, gaining XP and levelling up your skills as you do. You can also earn 'treasure', which can be equipped and applied to your fighter to help you in various ways (recharging health, increasing stats and the like). The aim, other than obviously defeating all your enemies, is to try to collect each type of treasure, almost like a Pokémon game's Pokédex.

If all this cartoon tomfoolery isn't mature enough for your liking, the Virtual Hiryu mode may be more to your tastes.

A follow-up of sorts to Virtual Hiryu no Ken, which had released on PlayStation in Japan earlier the same year, it's a far more strait-laced fighting game which bears more than a passing resemblance to Sega's Virtua Fighter series. There are fewer options here – none of that treasure hunting nonsense, this is serious business – but players can choose between 2D and 3D modes. This doesn't affect the art style, as the fighters and backgrounds are polygonal regardless. It simply determines whether players have the ability to sidestep around the arena (and essentially move in three dimensions), or whether the game is instead locked to a single plane.

As an entire package, Flying Dragon undoubtedly provided value for money among fighting game fans since it essentially included two games in one, and even though some publications suggested the fighting itself was somewhat unoriginal, the same can't be said about the concept. It's clear that Culture Brain was more fond of the cuter SD style mode, however, because when it came to releasing a sequel to the game, it ditched the Virtual Hiryu mode altogether and went chibi-only in SD Hiryu no Ken Densetsu (which can be found in the Japanese games section at the back of this book). ■

FACT

The Japanese version was called Hiryu no Ken Twin. Some UK magazines and the website IGN wrongly referred to it as Art of Fighting Twin, even though it had nothing to do with SNK's Art of Fighting series.

FORSAKEN 64

Year	1998
Publisher	Acclaim Entertainment
Developer	Iguana Entertainment UK

IN THE YEAR 2113, particle physicists at Earth's Central Scientific Research Facility take things a bit too far. After discovering the ability to manipulate matter at its most basic level, they start researching its potential, including the creation of tiny fusion clusters that could keep a sun burning for 100 billion years. After something goes wrong, a huge fusion reaction rips through the world's communications infrastructure, inflicting on the Mechanoid Defence Force (MDF) – a huge array of mechanical defence systems designed to protect the Earth – a trillion errors. With no idea what to do, the machines open fire on the Earth itself, wiping out all life, almost tearing it from its orbital axis and destroying the atmosphere, exposing it to the radiation of the Sun. The world has had better Tuesdays, basically. Eventually, the Earth is classified as 'condemned' and bounty hunters and mercenaries start turning up to steal what remains. What they don't realise is that the five commanders who control the MDF are still alive and, deciding this is a good opportunity to rid the universe of thieving scum, have reprogrammed the machines to kill any humans on sight. As one of these mercenaries, it's up to you to destroy the MDF, killing other bounty hunters along the way, and reach the commanders' fortress to put an end to them too. With your guns, obviously.

Forsaken shares a lot in common with Descent, a PC and PlayStation game released a couple of years earlier. As in that game, the aim is to pilot your way through a series of labyrinthine stages filled with corridors and tunnels, blasting any robotic enemies that dare to get in your way. Controlling your ship takes a little getting used to, because there's no real sense of gravity: you're free to move in any direction and rotate your ship however you please, meaning it can be quite easy to get disoriented if you don't keep your wits about you. The stages are split into five different mission types, each with their own objective. Collect has you trying to find one (or more) specific objects, Defend has you trying to protect one (or more) objects from incoming enemies, Destroy tasks you with hunting down and destroying one (or more) certain targets and Boss puts you up against one (or… well, just one) of the game's meanest enemies. The purest form of enjoyment, though, can be found in the Clear stages, where your aim is simple: wipe out absolutely everything that moves.

FACT

The game's music was created by an electronic drum and bass duo called The Swarm. This included Dominic Glynn, who in 1986 had composed the title theme for season 23 of *Doctor Who* (during the Colin Baker era).

Oddly, despite being an accomplished action game that was generally well received when it was released, Forsaken 64 is best known among some for its cover rather than anything found in the game itself. In one of the strangest cover designs in gaming, the box doesn't actually depict anything related to the game: instead, it simply shows the face of an attractive woman with a tear falling from her eye, with a heart tattooed on her cheek that says 'Forsaken' on it. And if that doesn't get you excited to blow things up I don't know what will. ■

FOX SPORTS COLLEGE HOOPS '99

Year 1998
Publisher Fox Sports Interactive
Developer Z-Axis

FOX SPORTS' ATTEMPT at a college basketball game was originally supposed to be published by BMG Interactive, but when BMG went under Fox took over and decided to publish the game itself. The delay that resulted from this meant that by the time the game was released, some criticised it for being a little on the outdated side compared to other Nintendo 64 basketball games. That's not to say it was entirely without merit, of course, the most obvious selling point being the game's official NCAA licence. More than 120 college teams are featured in College Hoops '99, all with their own official logos and uniforms. Unlike pro sports organisations like the NBA, the NCAA didn't allow its athletes to appear in anything that could be used to make money, so while each player here has a name, it's a made up one. Still, the licence does allow the player to take on a full 25-game season, including the Conference and NCAA tournaments and a host of season opening tournaments like the Tri-State Invitational or the Windy City Shootout. The game was praised for its opponent AI, which was considered extremely impressive at the time (partly thanks to Rhode Island head coach Jim Harrick, who provided team analysis). While it suffered from slowdown at times, particularly when shooting, the fact it would ultimately be the only college sports game on the Nintendo 64 at all meant fans didn't have much choice otherwise. ■

FACT

The NCAA's rule not to allow its athletes to make money must have been particularly galling for Jeff Sheppard of the University of Kentucky, who appears on the cover.

G.A.S.P!! FIGHTERS' NEXTREAM

Year 1998
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

AS WELL AS holding the prize for the most ridiculously named Nintendo 64 game (that was released in the west, at least), G.A.S.P!! is a one-on-one fighting game with a couple of interesting gimmicks. Chief among these is the ability to create your own fighter, building them from a modest selection of preset body and outfit parts. Armed with a basic moveset, you can then take on AI opponents in the 'Training' mode and, should you beat them, you'll be able to pick one of their moves to add to your repertoire. Combat takes place in a series of 3D arenas but, somewhat unusual for the era, these stages contain objects and other scenery that can be used to your advantage. Opponents can be knocked into the likes of large boulders, cars and pipes to do extra damage, and some walls are destructible, allowing you to kick someone through them to reach different areas. It isn't all harmful, though: some stages have the likes of old tyres, cardboard boxes and puddles of water, which will help reduce the damage you take if you fall onto them. The title may have been silly, but it was only called G.A.S.P!! in Europe and the game's native Japan: in North America it had the far less interesting name Deadly Arts. And in case you were wondering, G.A.S.P!! stands for Generation of Arts, Speed and Power. Obvious now you know it, really. ■

FACT

The character Kai was voiced by Jun'ichi Kanemaru, who's been the Japanese voice of Sonic the Hedgehog ever since he first spoke in Sonic Adventure.

GAUNTLET LEGENDS

Year	1999
Publisher	Midway / Epoch
Developer	Atari Games

LIKE MOST OTHER games in the Gauntlet series, Gauntlet Legends began life as an arcade game before eventually being ported to home consoles. Despite its coin-op beginnings, Legends is a fairly deep action game with RPG elements that weren't found in previous Gauntlet titles. As such, while it's a fairly straightforward experience as far as console games go, in its original arcade context it was a surprisingly in-depth adventure. Given its fantasy themes, the plot for Gauntlet Legends is detailed enough that I could probably fill a couple of pages explaining it alone, so let's just say you play as a hero who has been summoned by the generally quite friendly wizard Sumner to defeat the evil demon Skorne and his minions, and bring peace back to the four worlds of Gauntlet. Starting off in Sumner's Tower, you have to travel through each of the four worlds and find special obelisks which can be used to restore Sumner's power.

As in the first game in the Gauntlet series, you initially have four characters to choose from, each with their own different strengths and weaknesses. The Warrior, who's basically a cosplay Conan, has extremely strong melee attacks but his ability to use magic is terrible. The Archer is the fastest character in the game and her long-range attack is obviously great, but she's very weak. The Wizard is also weak, and slow

on top of that, but his magic attacks are second to none, and finally the Valkyrie is your token all-round character with no major benefits or hindrances. By playing through the game, you can also unlock five extra characters, who essentially act as clones of the main four and perform exactly the same but with a different appearance. The Minotaur, for example, is basically the Warrior but with a bull's head, while the Tigress and Falconess are just the Archer and Valkyrie respectively, albeit cooler looking. The Wizard, meanwhile, gets two clone characters in the form of the Jackal, and Sumner himself.

While the general gameplay is also similar to other Gauntlet games – in that the action is generally played from an overhead perspective as the player takes on endless hordes of monsters until they can reach and destroy the bases that spawn them – Legends also adds a levelling up system, in which players can gain experience by killing monsters and building their strength, speed, armour and magic attacks as they progress. The arcade version let players save their progress by entering their initials and a PIN number (similar to NBA Jam), but the Nintendo 64 version wasn't quite so generous, requiring a Controller Pak to save data rather than saving it on the cartridge. That wasn't the only add-on required for the full experience: if players wanted to take part in four-player co-op they would also need an Expansion Pak. Without it, you're limited to three players. ■

FACT

The N64 version's producer, Scot Amos, became the head of studio at Crystal Dynamics in 2015, overseeing the development of games like Rise of the Tomb Raider and Marvel's Avengers.

GEX 64: ENTER THE GECKO

Year	1998
Publisher	Midway / GT Interactive
Developer	Realtime Associates

VERY FEW PLATFORMING heroes made the jump from 2D to 3D as quickly as Gex did. Given that his debut, a side-scrolling platformer, was released during the PlayStation era, it's little surprise that the wise-cracking gecko had already earned his Z-axis by the time his second game was ready. Originally released on PlayStation a few months before the Nintendo 64 port appeared, Enter the Gecko is that second adventure and the response was generally positive, even though the character of Gex himself was somewhat divisive.

Gex is a smartass gecko whose real passion is television, and the first game had him travelling through the Media Dimension – a series of TV-themed worlds – to defeat its evil overlord Rez. In the second game, Rez has returned, but Gex has no real interest in fighting him again: not when he's got so much telly to watch. After eventually being 'convinced' with a briefcase of money, Gex reluctantly agrees to return to the Media Dimension and give Rez the season finale he should have had last time. He does this in typical 3D platformer fare with the game's main gimmick being the diverse nature of its levels, with Gex often donning a different costume for each. There are eight 'channels', each covering a different genre: Scream TV, for example, spoofs horror movies, while the slightly questionable Kung-Fu Theater is an area dedicated to old martial arts movies where Gex, dressed in full karate attire, takes on stages called Mao Tse Tongue and Samurai Night Fever. This game doesn't do subtlety, in case you're wondering.

As one of the chattier platforming heroes of his era, Gex is something of a 'love him or hate him' protagonist. He's constantly dropping terrible one-liners, which is either great or irritating depending on your comedic tastes. Interestingly, though, the North American and European versions each had a different voice actor for Gex, who took his personality in wildly different directions. In the North American version of the game (and other Gex games) he's voiced by comedian Dana Gould, who plays him as a bit of a loud-mouth. The European version, meanwhile, casts Leslie Phillips, the smooth-voiced English actor best known for playing upper class roles in the *Carry On* films (or, for younger readers, the Sorting Hat in the *Harry Potter* movies). This gives Gex more of a suave, 60s-era James Bond style that's maybe a little less abrasive for some.

FACT

The lack of an ending means N64 users don't see the slightly racy scene in which Gex shares a hotel room with another platforming protagonist, Nikki from Pandemonium.

The Nintendo 64 version of Enter the Gecko is lacking quite a bit of content that's present in the PlayStation game. While N64 players get a new underwater stage, six of the PlayStation stages have been removed. The reduced storage space on the cartridge means the number of voice samples is also drastically cut, with Gex only having around 100 lines compared to the roughly 700 on PlayStation. Perhaps most frustratingly, though, the removal of FMV sequences means the N64 game doesn't actually have an ending, cutting straight to the credits once you beat Rez. ■

GEX 3: DEEP COVER GECKO

Year 1999
Publisher Crave Entertainment
Developer Gratuitous Games

THE THIRD (AND ultimately final) game in the Gex series plays a lot like Enter the Gecko, with near-identical 3D platforming gameplay. This time Gex's girlfriend Agent Xtra has been kidnapped by Rez, so Gex has to return to the Media Dimension once again to rescue her. Somewhat bizarrely, Agent Xtra is a live-action character played by an actual human: former Playboy model and occasional Baywatch cast member Marliece Andrada, to be precise. Avoiding the obvious inter-species connotations this brings with it, it also forces the Nintendo 64 to provide actual full-motion video sequences for once (albeit far fewer than the PlayStation version) each time Agent Xtra sends video messages to Gex. This time there are 11 channels for Gex to run, jump and tail-whip his way through, ranging from the Holiday Broadcasting channel (allowing for the obligatory snow level), a mysteries channel which has Gex dressed as Sherlock Holmes, and even an anime channel where Gex, wearing a mech suit, has to fight Japanese schoolgirls. As before, Gex has a different voice actor depending on the region. In North America he's once again played by Dana Gould, but Europeans had to bid farewell to Leslie Phillips, who didn't return to the role. Instead, Gex is played by Danny John-Jules, best known as the Cat in the wonderful BBC sci-fi sitcom *Red Dwarf*. This does at least give the character more consistency, making his voicework energetic and loud regardless of which version you play. ■

FACT

N64 owners 'missed out' on yet another hotel bedroom ending in Gex 3, this time not getting the FMV scene where Gex and Agent Xtra prepare to... you know.

GLOVER

Year 1998
Publisher Hasbro Interactive
Developer Interactive Studios

PUT YOUR INDEX and middle fingers on a nearby table and and wiggle them to make it look like they're a pair of legs walking. Congratulations, you've just perfectly recreated Glover, a strange platforming protagonist who's little more than a sentient glove who can run and jump. Seemingly deciding that anthropomorphic handwear wasn't unique enough, developer Interactive Studios went one step further with Glover and added a magic ball to proceedings too. Glover has to get this ball to the end of each stage and can interact with it in a number of ways to help it get there, from bouncing it to help it get up steps, to throwing it at targets and over gaps (apparently just picking the thing up isn't in Glover's wheelhouse). It can also switch to different types of ball, each with their own properties: the bowling ball can kill enemies and sinks in water, the ballbearing is magnetic and the crystal ball floats on water and gives extra bonuses, but is obviously very fragile. The sum of all these parts is an interesting puzzle platformer that has plenty of unique ideas, but was ultimately criticised for presenting them in a slightly fiddly, frustrating way. As such, Glover perhaps didn't get the attention its level of innovation may have deserved. That said, the N64 version was far better received than the PlayStation port released the following year, which was heavily slated by critics for looking noticeably worse and running slower. ■

FACT

A sequel to Glover, cleverly titled Glover 2, was in production but was ultimately cancelled at about 80 per cent completion. A prototype can be found online, however.

GOLDENEYE 007

Year 1997
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Rare

IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY be wrong to suggest that GoldenEye 007 was one of the first major first-person shooter games: anyone with a shred of gaming knowledge knows that's nowhere near the case. What it was, however, was one of the first games to take a genre that was generally considered to be a better experience on PC and adapt it to console gaming in a way that made it feel like a natural fit. Perhaps more importantly, it was also the first time many players – PC owners included – got to experience the joy of multiplayer deathmatches in an FPS game, given that the N64's four controller ports and the game's split-screen mode were significantly more accessible than having to set up a PC LAN party.

Based on the 17th James Bond movie and the first to star Pierce Brosnan as the iconic secret agent, GoldenEye was something of an anomaly in the world of movie tie-ins in that it wasn't released at the same time as the film. Instead, the game came out almost two years after the film did, with many suggesting that this contributed to its status as one of the best licensed games ever. With no need to rush the game so it was ready to coincide with the film's theatrical release, GoldenEye was given the time it needed to be fully fleshed out and refined into the classic it's known as today.

While not the first major FPS, GoldenEye still brought a freshness to the genre by introducing numerous ideas that were either

firsts or, at the very least, made known to the masses for the first time. The ability to pick up a sniper rifle early in the game made perfect use of the Nintendo 64's Control Stick, allowing players to slowly move their sights and try to pick an enemy off from a great distance. This was made even more satisfying by the more realistic way enemies reacted to being shot, with different body parts triggering different animations. Shoot a bad guy in the leg and he'd react differently to if you shot him in the head, and the damage he would take would be more authentic too: headshots would almost always be guaranteed kills, but pop a bullet in a chap's rump and he'll probably be able to walk it off after a while unless you finish him off with another shot.

Of all the games in this book, GoldenEye is the one that most players can cite 25 years later as one of their favourite multiplayer experiences ever. Many can still recite by heart the specific rulesets they chose when playing with their friends (for me it was Facility, Licence to Kill, Slappers Only, no Oddjob). Nintendo may not have had GoldenEye in mind when it decided to give the console four controller ports, but it was a decision that would ultimately elevate what was already an excellent single-player game to one of the greatest multiplayer experiences in the history of video games. ■

FACT

In early 2021, a cancelled HD remaster of GoldenEye for the Xbox 360 was leaked online. It was almost completely finished, and greatly improved resolution and frame rate.

GOLDEN NUGGET 64

Year	1998
Publisher	Electronic Arts
Developer	Westwood Studios

IF YOU CRAVE the excitement of casino gambling without the added benefit of actually winning any real money, then Golden Nugget 64 – as the only gambling game released on the N64 in the west – is undoubtedly the game for you, if only by default. Taking place at the actual Golden Nugget luxury hotel and casino in Las Vegas, it lets players take part in 10 different gambling games in order to try and end up with more virtual cash than the $1,000 they start with. Fans of card games get the best deal here (pun always intended), with six of the games being of the deck-based variety: blackjack, five-card draw, seven-card stud, video poker, Texas hold 'em and mini baccarat. Making up the rest of the numbers are craps (stop sniggering, I mean the game where you bet on dice rolls), roulette, the Big Six wheel and that classic casino staple, the slot machines. There are six slot machines to choose from, each with a different theme: Catch of the Day, Motherlode, Sports Fanatic, Wheels of Fire, Miner 49er and Card Bonanza (just in case you hadn't had your fill of card-related games already). If the excitement is getting too much for you and you fancy recklessly throwing your own actual money away, there's also a Slideshow option which shows you photos of the real Golden Nugget casino and hotel rooms, presumably with the intention of making you want to go. ■

FACT

The Golden Nugget's iconic sign features in Balrog's stage in Street Fighter II, with the 'Gambling Hall' name under it replaced by 'Nin-Nin Hall', named after the game's designer Akira 'Nin-Nin' Nishitani.

GT 64: CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

Year	1998
Publisher	Infogrames / Ocean / Imagineer
Developer	Imagineer

THIS BOOK HAS already established that there were numerous Nintendo 64 games dedicated to Formula One racing, but what if your tastes were a little more touring car-y? And what if 'touring car-y' was an actual phrase? The answer (to the first question, at least) was GT 64, which was an officially licensed game based on the 1997 All Japan Grand Touring Car Championship. Many (though not all) of the official teams and drivers from the real-life competition are featured here, including that season's eventual winner, the #36 Castrol TOM'S Toyota Supra driven by Michael Krumm and Pedro de la Rosa. Naturally, given its licensed nature, it's an attempt at a realistic racing game similar to the PlayStation's Gran Turismo series. There are only three tracks in the game – USA, Europe and Japan – but each has a long and short variant as well as mirror modes, meaning technically there are 12 if you want to get pedantic about it (as the back of the game box certainly did). If you're made of money and fancy increasing that to four, you may want to also splash out on the Japanese version of the game, named City Tour GrandPrix,. While it's mostly similar to the western release, two of the tracks have different names (Japan and Europe are instead Tokyo and Lake Fuji in Japan), and one track is completely different. Whereas the western release has an American street race, this is replaced with a Kyoto street circuit. ■

FACT

The Japanese version also included Porsche and Lamborghini cars, though (presumably for licensing reasons) these were replaced with similar cars sporting the Imagineer and Ocean logos for the western release.

HARVEST MOON 64

Year 1999
Publisher Natsume / Pack-In Soft
Developer Victor Interactive Software

HARVEST MOON 64 is the third game in the Harvest Moon series (or the fourth, if you count the Game Boy and Game Boy Color versions as separate games). Like its predecessors, the game has players inheriting a farm (this time from their dead grandfather) and tasks them with transforming it from a humble, worse-for-wear field to a thriving agricultural paradise. The twist is that you can't just merrily take your sweet time doing this: you only have two years and three months until the game ends and your father turns up to give you a score based on how well you've done (which is an unusual parenting technique, but what do I know). The various farming tasks available to you include growing crops to sell them for profit, raising animals and livestock and gathering resources by foraging, mining and fishing. As in other Harvest Moon games, however, the actual farming work is only half the adventure: the other half involves the relationships you build with the people in the nearby village. The ultimate aim is to not only woo and eventually marry one of the cheerful young ladies living nearby, but to also befriend the men in the village and trying to marry them off with the four other bachelorettes in town. And if you think that all sounds a bit odd, then, um… no comment. Because of the speed at which the clock ticks away in this particular instalment, Harvest Moon 64 is considered one of the hardest games in the series. ■

FACT

Harvest Moon 64 came to the western Wii U Virtual Console in early 2017, finally ending an 18-year wait for European players to buy the game.

HERCULES: THE LEGENDARY JOURNEYS

Year 2000
Publisher Titus Software
Developer Player 1

FOR SOME PEOPLE of a certain generation, the sight of hunky meathead Kevin Sorbo playing the titular role in TV series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* was a highlight of their weekly routine. The Nintendo 64 adaptation may not have set pulses racing quite so rapidly, but that's not to say it was a terrible effort: a derivative one, sure, but not bad. Taking more than a little inspiration from The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, the Hercules game has players controlling the main man himself as well as his friends Iolaus and Serena as they attempt to restore order to the kingdom and save the entire world. The problem, you see, is that Ares (Hercules' brother and the son of Zeus) has seized the throne after Zeus was poisoned by Hera. It's up to Hercules and his chums, then, to free Zeus and travel to Ares' shrine on Mount Olympus – taking out various monsters along the way such as Minotaurs and Mnemosyne the Titan – to punt Ares off his chair and stop things going awry. Putting aside the obvious visual similarities to Zelda, the game does boast some differences, particularly in the way you can switch to Iolaus and Serena at various points in the game and use their own abilities (such as Ioalus's staff and Serena's bow and arrow) to take on specific problems. In North America, Hercules started off as a Blockbuster Video exclusive before eventually seeing a proper retail release. ■

FACT

Kevin Sorbo got an aneurysm in his shoulder in 1997 which caused four strokes, but he kept it secret from the public and continued to film Seasons 5 and 6 of *Hercules* regardless.

HEXEN

Year 1997
Publisher id Software / Gamebank
Developer Software Creations

IN 1994 ID Software published Heretic, a first-person shooter which was developed by Raven Software and used the Doom engine. Its sequel, Hexen: Beyond Heretic, was released the following year to similar critical acclaim, and console ports eventually came to the N64, PlayStation and Saturn in 1997. The game takes place in the Cronos realm, where a Serpent Rider called Korax has taken over. The aim is a simple one: pick one of three characters and track down and kill Korax. Each character represents a different class of combat: there's Baratus the fighter (who's naturally best with melee attacks), Daedolon the mage (who specialises in long-range spell attacks) and Parias the cleric (who's equally adept at both). Of the three console ports, the Nintendo 64 version is considered the best, because although it lacks the FMV sequences found in the CD-based versions it doesn't have to make the vast majority of the visual sacrifices that Sony and Sega's consoles did. More importantly, it also boasted that classic Nintendo 64 staple, the four-player split-screen multiplayer mode. That said, despite the efficiency of the port, the N64 version of Hexen was still met with a relatively lukewarm response. This was partly because by the time it finally arrived on consoles the game was two years old, and GoldenEye 007 was mere months away and already promising to advance the console FPS genre somewhat. It was also criticised for an awkward control method, where the D-Pad is used for looking, the Control Stick is used for moving and the A button attacks. ■

FACT

The N64 version received new French, German and Japanese dubs, but the French and German ones didn't change the clip length in the code, meaning any lines that were longer than the English ones were cut short.

HEY YOU, PIKACHU!

Year 1998
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Ambrella

IMAGINE IF YOU had your very own Pokémon and were able to talk to it whenever you liked. Even better, imagine if that Pokémon was a Pikachu, arguably the most popular of all Pocket Monster breeds. That was the concept behind Hey You, Pikachu!, a game that promises a lot more than technology was perhaps capable of delivering at the time. It comes bundled with the Voice Recognition Unit, a special microphone accessory that plugs into the fourth controller port of the Nintendo 64. The idea is that by speaking into the giant yellow microphone, players can communicate with Pikachu by saying basic voice commands and messages to him, which he then responds to. Players can then help him take part in mini-games, like hitting a piñata and fishing. Unfortunately, voice recognition wasn't too advanced in 1998 and as a result players are pretty limited in what they can say to Pikachu: he can only understand around 250 phrases in total. The game was never released in Europe, but it's perhaps unsurprising: given how hard it must have been to get Pikachu to understand a variety of North American accents, you can only imagine the headache involved in throwing numerous other countries and languages into the mix. Ultimately, Hey You, Pikachu! is the sort of game that could have worked so much better had it been released nowadays, and while credit must be given for the idea, the execution didn't quite live up to it. ■

FACT

Because it's customary in Japan to take your shoes off before entering your home, the Japanese version of the game has a pair of shoes sitting outside the sliding glass door in your room.

HOT WHEELS TURBO RACING

Year	1999
Publisher	Electronic Arts
Developer	Stormfront Studios

THERE ARE FEW licensed properties that lend themselves better to video games (and racing games in particular) than Hot Wheels. The idea of collecting a wide variety of fun, brilliantly designed cars and putting them on elaborate, brightly coloured tracks has 'video games' written all over it and so it's probably no great surprise that there have been more than 15 Hot Wheels games released over the years at the time of writing. Hot Wheels Turbo Racing was the first of these to be released on home consoles, and it still holds up well today as an entertaining racer, even if it has been surpassed by other Hot Wheels games in recent times, not to mention a brilliant Forza Horizon 3 expansion.

The game features 40 cars, all of which are based on real life Hot Wheels vehicles. These include the likes of Slideout (which is similar to a sprint car), Stagefright (which resembles an 1800s stagecoach) and Thunder Roller (a huge semi truck with a jet turbine attached to the back). It also includes a car that's simply called Hot Wheels Car: this is based on the 1999 NASCAR stock car raced by Kyle Petty, which was sponsored by Hot Wheels at the time and was turned into a Hot Wheels toy too. In case it wasn't clear that this isn't the most serious of racing games, there are power-ups dotted around each of the 11 tracks.

Interestingly, these are power-ups in the literal sense of the word, rather than weapons.

Whereas karting games like Mario Kart arm players with items that can be used to actively attack players such as shells and bananas, every power-up in Hot Wheels Turbo Racing is instead designed to enhance the car's abilities. The 4x4 power-up, for example, allows the car to drive over muddy and slippery surfaces without slowing down (meaning it can access many of the shortcuts containing such surfaces), while the Gyro power-up lets you pull off better stunts by spinning your car quicker. Others improve your car's grip, braking and handling, and only a couple can actually harm your opponents, but only as a secondary function (such as the Car of Steel power-up, which gives your car maximum durability and wrecks anyone who drives into you).

FACT

Larry Wood, who designed many classic Hot Wheels toys, once designed a tow truck with his real phone number on the side. After getting countless phone calls from children he had to change his number.

There are two main modes to choose from (as well as an Exhibition Race mode for 1–2 players). Hot Wheels Cup is your typical Grand Prix style mode where you earn points for your position in each race, while Airtime Challenge is a stunt mode where you're scored based on how many cool tricks you can pull off. Speaking of cool, you may not expect a game based on a toy brand generally enjoyed by children to have music worth speaking about, but the 'radical' nature of the Hot Wheels brand coupled with EA's penchant for licensed music means the game has a pretty rocking soundtrack, with music from the likes of Metallica, Master Mike, Primus and the Reverend Horton Heat. ■

HYBRID HEAVEN

Year	1999
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEO

AFTER THE ENORMOUS success of Metal Gear Solid on the PlayStation, Nintendo 64 owners were hoping that Konami would be able to deliver a similar experience with Hybrid Heaven. That same dream was shared by the game's developer, Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka, which was keen to follow in the footsteps of KCE's Japan studio and produce something of a similar quality to Hideo Kojima's Sony-exclusive masterpiece. Of course, history shows that this didn't quite happen, but that doesn't mean Hybrid Heaven should be entirely overlooked: while it may not have come close to the level of success Kojima's game enjoyed, it still delivered an extremely interesting third-person adventure at a time when the genre was still fairly early in its development.

You play as Diaz, a synthetic human hybrid who ends up in his alien creator's bad books after he foils a plot to kill the President's bodyguard and replace him with another synthetic human. Following a scuffle that ensues as a result of this apparent mutiny, Diaz finds himself in a huge underground installation underneath Manhattan and has to investigate what's going on. To say any more would spoil a frankly ridiculous plot that's got more twists in it than a 1950s' dance contest, but suffice to say you'll remain engaged and thoroughly entertained throughout, if only because of how silly the whole thing is.

The most interesting aspect of Hybrid Heaven is the way it combines two different playstyles. True to its name, the game is a hybrid of third-person action-adventure gameplay and turn-based combat. As you run around you're usually armed with a 'diffuser' gun, which can be used to take out the most basic mechanical enemies. When you encounter most other enemies, however, the game switches to a turn-based system where you're free to run around a set area, trying to choose the best moment to attack. Your attack options are oddly specific, and are broken down into individual punch and kick types (such as a left-handed, mid-height hook punch). You can eventually end up with more than 20 kick types alone.

FACT

The game's director Yasuo Daikai said in an interview that the story was a 'very difficult thing' to create given its numerous twists. So don't worry, he thought it was crazy too.

Defending yourself from attack is also fairly in-depth. You can choose to block the attack and take some damage, attempt to counter it and return some damage to the enemy instead, or attempt an evasive manoeuvre, which involves choosing a direction in which to duck or dodge and hoping your enemy swings the other way. The whole thing is an interesting take on combat but ultimately there's a lot of guesswork involved, and as such it's arguably not quite as satisfying as it would have been had it featured standard real-time combat similar to fighting games.

Hybrid Heaven has retained something of a cult following over the years because of its attempt to mix things up and try something different. While it may never have enjoyed the highs of the Metal Gear Solid series, it's still worth a look if you want to experience a different Konami game with a similarly eccentric plot. ■

HYDRO THUNDER

Year	2000
Publisher	Midway
Developer	Eurocom

MIDWAY MAY HAVE started its life on Nintendo 64 with Cruis'n USA and followed up with its subsequent sequels, but those weren't the only arcade racers the publishers brought to the 64-bit beauty. Originally developed by Midway San Diego and released in arcades in 1999, Hydro Thunder was its attempt to take the typical arcade racing genre and swap the cars out for boats to see if that idea floated (sorry). It absolutely did, and home console ports of Hydro Thunder were promptly put into development, with the N64 version releasing a little under a year after the launch of the arcade game.

It doesn't take a PhD in race-o-nomics to figure out what the aim is in Hydro Thunder. Driving your turbo-powered speedboat of choice, you have to reach the finish line as quickly as possible. And if you can manage to do it before any of the other racers then hey, all the better. The manual tries to offer up a plot: you're one of the greatest boat racers in the world, but now you've been invited to take part in the H.T.R.A. – the Hydro Thunder Racing Association – which is an 'underground clan of adventurous racing renegades'. Tough obviously not too underground if they're racing speed boats.

Of course, the plot is absolute bunkum and can be completely dismissed, because at its core this is about winning races and nothing else. At first you can only choose between three Easy tracks – a straightforward loop called Thunder Park, an icy track by the name of Arctic Circle and a lost volcanic island named, um… Lost Island. By finishing in a high enough position you can unlock three Medium tracks, then three Hard tracks and finally four bonus tracks for a total of 13. These are varied enough (despite all obviously being water-based): along the way you'll be racing through a canyon in Utah, a river in China, the canals of Venice, an abandoned and flooded Scottish castle, and even a post-apocalyptic New York following a meteor crash. The selection of playable boats follows the same process – you start with three and unlock more at the same time as you unlock the tracks – and if you're good enough you'll unlock the Tinytanic, a small speedboat-sized version of the Titanic.

FACT

Hydro Thunder is an example of a game that uses the Expansion Pak for something other than a hi-res mode. If you have one, you can play multiplayer with 1–4 players instead of 1–2.

Adding some degree of strategy to the racing is the boost system. Each boat has a boost meter which is topped up by collecting icons located around the tracks. Some of these are deliberately placed in awkward positions so players sometimes have to go out of their way to collect the boosts, meaning skilful driving is needed to make sure you aren't wasting more time than it's worth to get them. Not that it isn't worth doing so, of course: each time you trigger your boost you also activate your boat's 'Mighty Hull' technique, which lets you ram through other boats and send them flying. Have some of that, you H.T.R.A. chumps.

IGGY'S RECKIN' BALLS

Year 1998
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Iguana Entertainment

IGGY IS A mischievous iguana (based on the mascot of developer Iguana Entertainment), who's decided he wants to climb to the top of the Sacred Towers in his peaceful homeland, the Cho-Dama Kingdom. To make things a little more exciting, though, he's invited a bunch of his friends along to climb the towers too, and they've decided to turn the whole thing into a race. Oh, and they're all shaped like balls, because, reasons. Iggy's Reckin' Balls, then, is a hybrid of a platformer and a racing game. There are 10 worlds in the game, each split into 10 stages, and the aim in each stage is to make your way to the top of the tower. The twist, however, is that there are three other balls also trying to reach the top, meaning you have to get there first. There's a kart game Grand Prix style scoring system in place, with more points going to better placed finishes, and the aim is to be the character with the most points after all 10 stages have been cleared in a world. This isn't a good, clean race, mind you: the title's got Reckin' in it for a reason. Each character may be shaped like a ball but they also have hands with impressive gripping capabilities. These hands are usually there to grapple onto higher platforms and pull yourself up, but they can also be used to grab nearby opponents and stun them by suplexing them onto their head. Which, considering they're practically all head, is an effective technique. ■

FACT

Here's a cheat code that really hasn't aged well at all: if you want to play the game in black and white so it looks like a sketch, enter the password ROLFHARRIS.

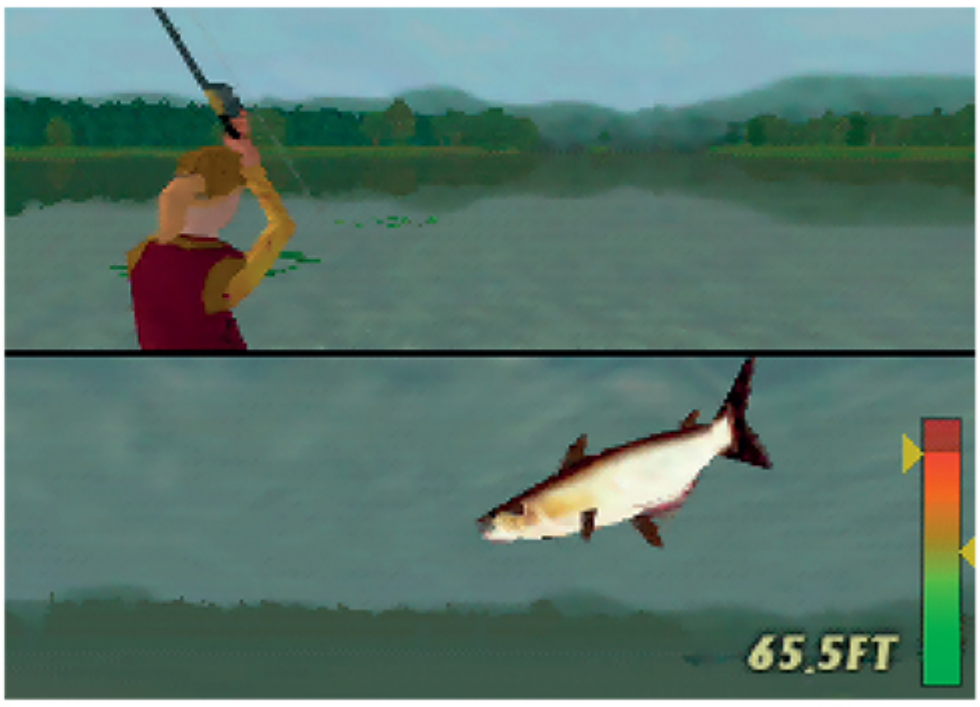
IN-FISHERMAN BASS HUNTER 64

Year 1999
Publisher Take-Two Interactive
Developer Gearhead Entertainment

KNOWN SIMPLY AS Bass Hunter 64 in Europe (and not to be confused with Swedish DJ Basshunter), Take-Two and Gearhead's fishing simulator sported a licensing deal in North America with *In-Fisherman*, a fishing magazine that was established in the mid '70s and at the time of writing is still alive and well, claiming to be 'the most recognised and respected brand in freshwater fishing'. As you've no doubt guessed, it's a fishing game which, like so many other fishing titles, focuses mainly on catching bass. There are two locations to choose from here – Lake Arthur in Pennsylvania and the Butler Chain in Florida – each of which has three different areas you can fish in. You can either take on Championship mode, which enters you in a series of bass-fishing tournaments, or you can choose Fish For Fun mode to ditch all that pageantry and reduce it all to the simple pleasures of one man (or woman), a boat and a bumload of fish. Although the general fishing gameplay itself is solid enough, what sets Bass Hunter 64 apart from most other fishing titles is the interesting variety of cheat codes which can add silly effects. Naturally, you've got your typical Big Head mode (and Big Fish mode, should you wish to land big 'uns more regularly), but other codes include the ability to replace your boat with a motorised bathtub, or the ability to replace each fish with the floating head of fishing personality and *In-Fisherman* co-founder Al Lindner. ■

FACT

If you want to try that bizarre Al Lindner cheat, the password is FISHMAN. And you haven't seen anything in life until you've seen the floating head of a bearded man trying to bite your lure.



INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

Year 2000
Publisher LucasArts
Developer Factor 5

AS YOU MAY have already heard, the story goes that when Tomb Raider was in early development it was originally going to have a male protagonist. After fears that this could be considered too much of an Indiana Jones rip-off, the hero evolved into Lara Croft and a popular culture icon was born. There's something quite poetic, then, in the fact that Indiana Jones would later star in a video game that is about as blatant a Tomb Raider imitation as you'll find. That's not to say that Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine is a bad game, of course, especially for the Lara-less Nintendo 64 owners for whom Indy's adventure was as good as they were going to get.

Set two years after the end of the Second World War, the game opens with Indy exploring the canyons of the American Southwest. Before long, he meets an old CIA friend, Sophia Hapgood, who tells him that the Soviets are trying to excavate the ruins of Babylon. The reason for this is the type of B-movie hokum you'd expect from an Indiana Jones movie: apparently 2,600 years ago, King Nebuchadnezzar II (the long-awaited sequel to King Nebuchadnezzar) was trying to build an engine – the titular infernal machine – that could reach across the dimensions of space and time. When the machine's gears started turning, the King's subjects decided that he was probably taking things a little too far and toppled the tower, with four of his disciples escaping with parts of the machine and hiding them in the four corners of the earth. It turns out the Soviets now want to recover these parts and complete the machine so they can potentially develop a weapon even more powerful than a nuclear bomb, so it's up to Indy to travel around the world and try and locate all four parts before the Soviets get to them.

The game takes Indy to the likes of the Philippines, Mexico, the Anglo–Egyptian Sudan and the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, and along the way he takes on countless enemies, both man and beast. Naturally, given his fear of snakes, you can expect them to turn up every now and then, and should he get bitten his health will slowly start to drain, meaning players need to apply an anti-venom before it's too late. Indy can fight back, of course, and he's armed with his trusty whip and revolver, while he can pick up a machete and other weapons later in the game.

FACT

Sophia Hapgood first appeared in another Indy game, the point-and-click adventure Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis. Both it and Infernal Machine were created by LucasArts designer Hal Barwood.

Despite being a tie-in for a fairly popular movie series, the N64 version of Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine was never actually sold in stores. Instead, Lucasarts let players pre-order it from their official website, then pulled it on the day the game launched. From that point on, it could only be rented in Blockbuster Video stores in North America. It isn't considered enormously rare since a decent number of cartridges were produced, but getting a good quality box with it is considerably trickier. ■

INDY RACING 2000

Year	2000
Publisher	Infogrames
Developer	Paradigm Entertainment

INDY CAR RACING is perhaps one of the most divisive sports around. For some, it offers open wheel racing without the elitism of F1, presenting a bunch of charismatic drivers and the potential for carnage as so many high-speed cars are crammed into a relatively short track and practically dared not to bump into each other for fear of exploding into flames. For others, however, it's simply a load of cars turning left over and over again on oval circuits, and no amount of lecturing about the tactical and technical side of it will ever convince them it's anything more than that. It shouldn't be a massive surprise that Indy Racing 2000 isn't designed to appeal to the latter group, but those who sit in the former camp will be perfectly happy with what's on offer here.

The game is based on the 1999 Pep Boys Indy Racing League (which was won by Greg Ray) and features 20 of the 65 drivers who took part over the course of the season, including the likes of Greg Ray himself, season runner-up Kenny Bräck and cousins Robby and Johnny Unser. There are nine tracks in the game – Orlando, Phoenix, Charlotte, Texas, Pikes Peak, Atlanta, Dover, Las Vegas and the famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway – and it sort of goes without saying that they're all fairly similar in style purely because of the nature of the sport: if you want an authentic recreation of the season, you've got to have a bunch of ovals in there.

FACT

Paradigm initially started in 1990 as Paradigm Simulation, and focused on making military training simulations for the likes of the US Department of Defense and Lockheed Martin, before shifting its focus to games.

Perhaps anticipating that this would be one of the game's main criticisms and may not make for the most exhilarating video game for non-Indy fans, developer Paradigm also added a special career mode called Gold Cup. In it, players name their own driver and work their way through a series of different car classes, from midget cars (their name, not mine) to sprint cars, Formula 2000 cars and eventually the Indy Racing League itself. As you race your way up to the Indy tier you'll take on other tracks which have their fair share of right turns as well as left, making it feel more like a 'conventional' racing game for those who crave that.

Fans of the sport were generally happy with Indy Racing 2000 and the way it made such a potentially technical racing experience more accessible. The game feels like more of an arcade-style take on Indy racing, with looser handling that almost feels like you can pull off drifts at times. Naturally though, it's not exactly Daytona USA and players can still customise various aspects of their car, including transmission, tyre pressure and gear ratio adjustment, and pit stops can either be automatic or manually controlled. In all, Indy Racing 2000 was a solid enough Indy Car game, and while it was perhaps never going to be engaging enough to convert naysayers who had already made up their mind about the sport, existing fans were well served by what was on offer. ■

INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER 64

Year	1997
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEO

THE BELIEF AMONG football video game fans that EA's FIFA series was all about style while Konami's football games were more about substance can be traced all the way back to the original International Superstar Soccer (ISS) on the SNES. While the early FIFA games were still great fun, ISS gave players an extra level of control, with satisfyingly fast and accurate passing and crossing. The notion that Konami's games were the better ones to play really came into its own, however, when both Konami and EA stepped into the polygonal era with their respective series. While EA struggled to nail down a satisfactory new game engine as FIFA 64 was met with criticism, Konami instead hit the ground running with International Superstar Soccer 64, which many believe completely redefined football video games.

In some respects ISS 64 was still similar to its 16-bit predecessors. Passing remained tight and players could still sprint to the byline and deliver beautifully pinpoint crosses to teammates. All player names were still fake, and were even carried over from the SNES games, meaning Italy still had its Roberto Baggio lookalike Galfano, while Brazil's Allejo remained one of the most skilful players in the game. There were still options to play either a tournament or a league, and the N64 game even carried over the Scenario mode, which gave players a series of situations they had to turn into a victory. In these respects, then, things hadn't changed too much.

FACT

Peruvian hackers Twin Eagles Group made a bootleg of ISS 64 called Mundial Ronaldinho Soccer 64, which has real player names and Portuguese commentary. The intro sequence has a strange laugh which became a meme for a while.

Where ISS 64 truly revolutionised the genre, however, was in the addition of some new techniques that have since become part and parcel of most football video games. The first of these was the ability to play one-two passes. By pressing the C-Right button, players could pass to a teammate, go on a run and then receive the ball back. If you held down the pass or chip button, the teammate would hold onto the ball while you controlled the original passer and moved them into space before releasing the button to complete the second pass. Even more influential, however, was the addition of a through ball button. A tap of the C-Up button was all it took to play a special pass which, rather than going straight to a teammate's feet, could be aimed ahead of them so they could run onto it. A perfectly timed through ball could tear through a defence and potentially leave players one-on-one with the goalkeeper.

With enough practice, expert players could make use of the through ball and one-two pass moves to put together some immensely satisfying plays that eclipsed anything EA was doing with FIFA at the time. Although these days it's a very different story and EA is widely considered to be top of the football game league table by a country mile, ISS 64 marked the period where the gap between the two was so far in Konami's favour that it was impossible to imagine FIFA ever being able to overtake it. But that's for another story. ■

INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER 98

Year 1998
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

AS THE INEVITABLE sequel to International Superstar Soccer 64 was being developed, the big talking point in the world of football was the France '98 World Cup. Despite releasing ISS 98 a few months after the tournament had ended, Konami chose to capitalise on its popularity anyway by ensuring that every team that had qualified for France '98 would be included in the game, with kits that closely matched those of the real-life teams. Although players' names were still fake, this time they more closely resembled those of the real-life players, meaning the likes of Ravanelli, Costacurta and Raul were now Revameli, Coscurta and Reull. A slightly tweaked International Cup mode was also included, which allowed players to pick a nation, start from the regional qualifying stage and attempt to get through that first before actually making it to the main tournament and trying to win that. Other than that, the changes made to ISS 98 were fairly modest ones, since its predecessor had already done so much right the first time around. A new optional vertical camera angle was added (allowing players to play from top to bottom instead of left to right) and ISS 64's uncredited 'so bad he's good' commentator was replaced by 'so bad he's good' Tony Gubba, whose lines of dialogue were still comically wonky thanks to the cartridge's limited storage space. The improvements meant ISS 98 was even better than ISS 64, further cementing Konami's status as the king of football video games. ■

FACT

The game featured Fabrizio Ravanelli and Paul Ince on the UK cover, and Carlos Valderamma on the North American cover despite the fact that none of them had their real names in the game.

INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER 2000

Year 2000
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

FOR THE THIRD and final International Superstar Soccer game on Nintendo 64, Konami went all-out to appeal primarily to European players. A new Euro Cup mode let players take part in an unofficial representation of the Euro 2000 tournament, and once again included the qualifying section first. To accommodate this, Konami had to include every single European national team that took part in the real-life qualifiers, meaning even relative footballing minnows like Malta and the Faroe Islands were in there to ensure the most accurate possible recreation. The North American and European versions of the game each had distinct differences that made them stand out from each other. The North American version actually has some real player names for the first time in the series' history, though oddly only some of them. This meant England would have the likes of Scholes, Owen and Neville playing in the same team as the likes of Begham and Adamis. While the European version doesn't have any real names at all, it does have something significantly more substantial: a Career mode (carried over from the Japanese equivalent, Jikkyo J-League 1999: Perfect Striker 2) which lets you create a footballer from scratch and take them through a series of training drills and matches, increasing their stats until they become a superstar. This mode makes the PAL version of the game the definitive one despite the lack of official player names, and as such it's the version most players would be wise to track down. ■

FACT

The series would continue in the PS2, GameCube and Xbox era for three more games (ISS, ISS 2 and ISS 3) before Konami ditched it in favour of its increasingly popular ISS Pro series on PlayStation, which became Pro Evolution Soccer.

INTERNATIONAL TRACK & FIELD 2000

Year	2000
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEO

ALTHOUGH TRACK & Field wasn't the only multidisciplinary athletics game that did well in the 1980s – Europeans in particular will be fully aware of the likes of Summer Games and Daley Thompson's Decathlon – there can be no denying that Konami's series was the most globally successful example of the genre. It had already enjoyed a great deal of exposure on Nintendo systems too, thanks to the release of both the original game and Track & Field II on the NES, as well as a Game Boy version if you fancy having a little bash of your buttons while on holiday (and who doesn't). International Track & Field 2000 was actually the ninth game in the series (if you take spin-offs like the official Nagano '98 Winter Olympics game into account) and was conveniently released in the same year as the Sydney 2000 Summer Olympics. Indeed, the Japanese version of the game is actually called Ganbare! Nippon! Olympics 2000 and has an official Olympics licence, though the western release is missing that authentic touch.

There are a total of 14 events in the game, though only 10 of them are initially available when you first play the game: 100m dash, long jump, hammer throw, pole vault, 100m freestyle swimming, horizontal bar, 110m hurdles, javelin throw, weightlifting and high jump. As well as a Championship mode (where eight events are chosen at random and you try to score as many total points as possible), there's also a Trial mode where you can pick a specific event and try to win a medal. It's here where the other four events are unlocked, as winning at least a bronze medal in all 10 standard events will unlock the 100m breaststroke swimming and the triple jump. Get silver in all 10 events plus those two extra ones to unlock another gymnastics event, the vault, and if you can manage to nab a gold medal in all 13 events after that you'll get the final unlockable, the entertaining trap shooting event. Of course, if you can't be bothered with all that faffing around, popping in the ever-faithful Konami Code on the title screen will unlock the other four events just like that (I'm snapping my fingers, by the way).

FACT

Entering your name as any of the cities who hosted previous Summer Olympics will turn your athlete a certain metallic colour. Call yourself Tokyo, for example, and you'll turn metallic red.

Each event is preceded by an animation showing players how to control their athlete, but even with that in place some of them naturally take a while to get used to. If you're happy enough with your abilities and want to use them to humiliate your friends, there's also a multiplayer option with all events playable by up to four players. Of course, given the way some of these events work, not all of them involve all four players taking part at the same time: while the races obviously do, the likes of weightlifting and the triple jump have you taking turns instead. After all, if all four of you tried to jump off the vault at the same time there would be awful injuries. ■

JEOPARDY!

Year 1998
Publisher Take-Two Interactive
Developer GameTek

ALTHOUGH THERE HAD been a combined total of 11 Jeopardy! games released on the NES, SNES and Game Boy, the Nintendo 64 would only receive one, and Nintendo fans then wouldn't see another one until the Wii era. This was mainly because developer GameTek had already fled for bankruptcy in late 1997 and closed its doors just a few months after the game was released. It's something of a shame, because the N64 attempt was probably the most authentic of the ones released to that point. For starters, host Alex Trebek makes an appearance – albeit in a brief FMV introducing players to the game – and the authentic music and chimes can be heard throughout. There's a fully 3D rendered studio, and questions can be answered (or answers can be questioned, since it's Jeopardy!) using an interesting predictive text style method in which players start typing in their response and the game uses its catalogue of words and phrases to suggest what you might be trying to say, saving time. It also uses a cool-off timer in which each question (I know, I mean answer) is shown with a 10-second countdown, and people can't buzz in until it runs down, in order to prevent people just buzzing in right away and then reading it. There are 650 categories containing a total of 4,000 questions/answers, though a couple are naturally out of date now. For example, it says the islands of St Pierre and Miquelon use the Franc as currency instead of the Euro. ■

FACT

Oddly, the game will not register inputs from any controller if you have one plugged into the fourth controller port. Such is its commitment to three-player competition that you have to unplug controller four to get it working again.

JEREMY MCGRATH SUPERCROSS 2000

Year 2000
Publisher Acclaim Sports
Developer Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City

THE ENORMOUS SUCCESS of the Tony Hawk games led to other extreme sports athletes being quickly snapped up and given their own video games in an attempt to make lightning strike twice. Acclaim decided to try it with a supercross racer, and five-time (at the time) AMA Supercross champion Jeremy McGrath was an obvious choice, resulting in the PlayStation title Jeremy McGrath Supercross 98. The 2000 sequel was also released on the Nintendo 64, and McGrath was reportedly involved more in its development than perhaps some other extreme sports stars were in their own games (although reception to the results was mixed). Not only did McGrath – along with a handful of other supercross racers – lend his likeness to the game, he also had an active role in designing some of the non-licensed tracks that were included in the game. There are eight indoor stadium courses and eight outdoor ones, but while 16 tracks may sound like a lot the reality is they're very similar in appearance (though given the nature of the sport that's at least understandable for the indoor ones). The McGrath-designed courses are also fairly safe efforts, and it appears that he designed the sort of thing he'd want to race on in real-life rather than something that would actually be fun in a game. If none of them exhilarate you, you can take matters into your own hands with the game's surprisingly flexible course designer, which lets you create your own tracks and race merrily on them as you flick two fingers at McGrath. ■

FACT

Jeremy McGrath ended up winning seven AMA Supercross Championships, won 89 races in his career and was inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 2010.

JET FORCE GEMINI

Year	1999
Publisher	Rare
Developer	Rare

OF ALL THE games developed by Rare during its golden era on Nintendo 64, Jet Force Gemini was perhaps the most divisive. Whether expectations were perhaps set too high at the time is up for debate, but it's actually aged better than many N64 games, and with the benefit of hindsight is one of the more accomplished titles on the system despite its frustrations. The game tells the story of the titular Jet Force Gemini, a galactic law enforcement team which has just been practically wiped out by the evil insectoid Mizar. Wiped out, that is, except for one ship, whose three-man crew (well, one man, one woman and a dog) lands on the planet Goldwood where Mizar's army of insectoid drones have attacked and captured a tribe of small cuddly creatures called the Tribals. It's up to these final three members of Jet Force Gemini – Juno, Vela and Lupus – to rescue the Tribals and defeat Mizar, blasting his bug army into millions of pieces in the process.

The game is a third-person action adventure in which players run around gunning down drones with your typical variety of weapons (pistols, machine guns, sniper rifles, flamethrowers, that sort of thing). There are 15 worlds to explore, each split into smaller stages, and the aim is to collect all of the Tribals on each stage because the game can't actually be beaten unless you have every single one of them. The twist is, some of these Tribals are located in areas that can't be reached by every character, meaning you have to make use of each hero's unique skills. Juno, for example, can safely walk through lava, while Vela can swim underwater and Lupus (who's a dog in a small spaceship because why not) can hover in the air for a while. As such, players need to essentially complete a stage three times (once with each character) to explore it fully and find every Tribal.

FACT

You can tell if you've got one of the first copies if there's a sticker on the box saying it has Rumble Pak support. These were hastily created by Nintendo to cover up a 'Designed for Expansion Pak' symbol, which it isn't.

In many ways, the game was a high point for Nintendo 64 development despite not even supporting the Expansion Pak. The game offers optional widescreen support and Dolby Surround, making it one of the most technically accomplished titles on the console. The main bone of contention among players, then, wasn't the quality of the presentation but the game's insistence on tucking its Tribals away in extremely awkward and obscure locations. Tribals can also be killed by enemies, and since you have to collect them all this means if one of them dies the player has to start that stage entirely from scratch with all enemies and locked doors reinstated. Despite the obvious frustrations this brings, Jet Force Gemini is one of the grandest, most content-heavy games on the system, and anyone trying it today – as long as they have the patience required to retry levels numerous times – will find an entertaining adventure that maybe doesn't get all the love it deserves compared to the rest of Rare's back catalogue. ■

KEN GRIFFEY JR.'S SLUGFEST

Year	1999
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Angel Studios

DID YOU KNOW that baseball superstar Ken Griffey Jr has a passion for molluscs? He has one of the largest collections of snails, clams and octopi in the world, but his favourite species is slugs, as demonstrated in this bizarre game where you join him as he explores his garden looking for new ones to add to his collection. That would have potentially been a suitable opening paragraph for a different game called Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest, but instead what we have here is a straightforward, no-nonsense baseball title with nary a creepy crawly in sight.

There's an added curiosity factor here in that Slugfest is one of a handful of American sports titles that were published by Nintendo itself, and is actually the fourth and final Nintendo-published game with Griffey Jr's name in the title. The reason for this lies with Nintendo's ownership of the Seattle Mariners at the time: when the team was facing relocation to Florida in 1992 if nobody was interested in buying it, Nintendo owner Hiroshi Yamauchi stepped up and took over a 60 per cent share as a thank you to the state of Washington for helping Nintendo find its footing in the American market. With Nintendo clearly having a vested interest in the success of the Mariners and the popularity of its players, much-loved center fielder and home run supremo Griffey Jr found himself on the cover of a bunch of Nintendo games: two SNES titles, the Nintendo 64 game Major League Baseball Starring Ken Griffey Jr. (found later in this book), and Slugfest, the last of the bunch.

FACT

Developer Angel Studios would go on to be known for the Smuggler's Run series and would eventually be renamed Rockstar San Diego.

At its core it provides exactly what you would expect from a typical baseball game of its era. It has the full Major League Baseball licence, meaning all team names, logos and uniforms are present and accounted for, as well as the MLBPA licence meaning all the real-life players are in there too. Every ballpark is also fully recreated in polygonal form, from Cleveland's Jacobs Field to the Skydome in Toronto, and players can choose to walk around them to see them in greater detail (such as it is) should they so desire. As well as a single exhibition match, players can also take part in a full season or just cut to the chase and play the World Series. Or, if they aren't happy enough with their batting skills they can practice in a Home Run Derby.

Speaking of batting, it's perhaps this which is the most standout aspect of Slugfest (and its N64 predecessor). Players have a strange oval-shaped cursor, which depicts the player's batting range, and they have to try to place it over the ball as it approaches to make contact with it. Each player's oval is a different size depending on their ability, meaning Griffey's oval is almost as big as one of those slugs he loves collecting. Or would, if he did. ■

KILLER INSTINCT GOLD

Year	1996
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Rare

WHEN THE ORIGINAL Killer Instinct was released in arcades in 1994, a message that appeared during the game's attract mode promised that it would be 'available for your home in 1995 only on Nintendo Ultra 64'. Obviously the console was then significantly delayed, so instead Rare ported Killer Instinct – albeit as a significantly watered down, but still entertaining version – to the 16-bit SNES. Despite the obvious differences between the arcade and SNES versions, the latter still shifted more than 3 million copies so when Rare started work on a Killer Instinct 2 arcade game the original plan was to bring this to the SNES as well. Eventually, though, greater sense prevailed and this was shifted over to the Nintendo 64 so that the promise of a 64-bit home console Killer Instinct game could finally be met.

Despite the title suggesting a sort of special edition of the first game, then, this is actually a port of Killer Instinct 2 instead, meaning three playable characters (Chief Thunder, Riptor and Cinder) have been removed and three new ones are added in their place. Kim Wu is a ninja teenager who is trying to protect her people from new boss Gargos (who looks like a gargoyle, naturally), Maya is an Amazonian warrior and Tusk is a Conan-like chap armed with a big sword. Although the new faces are welcome additions, the three departing characters were among the most popular in the first game so fans were far from happy at their removal at the time.

FACT

Killer Instinct Gold was to be the last game in the series for 17 years, until Microsoft finally revived the franchise and released a third game as an Xbox One exclusive.

The combo system that served as the first game's most defining characteristic has also been given more prominence: because normal moves are more likely to knock down opponents than before, this means players are encouraged to focus more on combos to damage them more efficiently. To help the player on the receiving end of the combo – the comboee, if you will – the game's combo breaker system has been made easier, making breaks more likely. The result is a game that continues its predecessor's heavy emphasis on combos and combo-breakers, but to even more of an extent.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Killer Instinct Gold is the way it differs from its arcade source material by handling the visuals in an alternative manner. The arcade version's increased power means sprites have more detail and more frames of animation at times (especially during the character select screen), but the backgrounds are essentially pre-rendered movies which play forwards and backwards as the screen scrolls to give the illusion that their perspective is changing as the camera moves. The N64 ditches this deceit in favour of doing it properly with fully polygonal backgrounds, which are slightly lower quality but give a more realistic sense of movement, run a full 60 frames per second and allow for dramatic zooms. As a result, whereas the SNES Killer Instinct looked undeniably worse than the arcade game, this time the N64 performed so well that deciding which version looked best was a matter of personal taste. ■

KIRBY 64: THE CRYSTAL SHARDS

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Hal Laboratory

RIPPLE STAR IS a peaceful planet, where fairies happily live without a care in the world. This all changes one day when an evil black cloud called Dark Matter arrives in search of the special crystal that watches over Ripple Star and protects it with its power. One of the fairies, Ribbon, knows that if Dark Matter gets hold of the crystal it'll be able to use its power to do untold damage to Ripple Star and the wider galaxy as a whole, so she grabs the crystal and escapes from the planet just as Dark Star takes over it completely. Unfortunately, a few clouds notice her legging it and chase her through space: when they catch up with her, the ensuing melee results in the crystal shattering into tiny pieces which are scattered throughout the solar system. Ribbon falls onto Pop Star, Kirby's planet, and explains what has happened. Kirby decides to team up with Ribbon and explore the galaxy to recover the shards of the crystal (or the Crystal Shards™, if you will).

Kirby 64 marked the polygonal debut for HAL Laboratory's pink puff ball, at least in a starring role (he had already appeared in Super Smash Bros. a year earlier). Despite its 3D appearance, the game is very much a side-scrolling platformer in the style of the previous Kirby adventures on the Game Boy, NES and SNES. It also makes use of Kirby's trademark Copy Ability move, in which he can inhale and swallow enemies then steal their powers. It's handled in a different way from usual, however, in that there are only seven abilities he can initially acquire: Burning, Stone, Ice, Needle, Bomb, Spark and Cutter. The twist is that Kirby can either use these abilities as normal or keep them in his belly and acquire a second ability, then combine the two to make a new one. For example, by combining Burning and Stone, Kirby can turn into a volcano which shoots flaming rocks upwards. This clever gimmick increases the number of possible abilities to 35.

FACT

Early magazine screenshots for Kirby 64 showed that King Dedede, Waddle Dee and Adeleine were originally supposed to be playable characters in the main adventure, rather than simply appearing in the mini-games.

Once you're done with the main game there are three mini-games you can choose from on the main menu, each of which can be played by up to four players representing Kirby, King Dedede, Waddle Dee and Adeleine. 100-Yard Hop has the characters racing by jumping over obstacles, Bumper Crop Bump makes them catch food falling from trees while chucking opponents out of the way, and Checkerboard Chase puts them on a big chess board where they have to make opponents fall off by removing the floor.

Interestingly, despite the jump from sprites to polygonal visuals, Kirby 64 is one of the few games on the Nintendo 64 that doesn't actually use the analogue Control Stick in any way. Kirby is fully controlled with the D-Pad, as are the game's menus, meaning if the Control Stick on your controller is faulty then at least you can take solace in the fact you have at least one game you can still play before you have to fork out for a new one. ■

KNIFE EDGE: NOSE GUNNER

Year 1998
Publisher Kemco
Developer Kemco

AT THE END of the twentieth century, the United States announced a plan to colonise Mars. By the end of the twenty-first century the planet was ready for colonisation, and by the middle of the twenty-second century Mars was fourishing as a lush green landscape. Nice things can't stay nice forever, however, and before long colonists started reporting that unknown lifeforms were starting to appear near the colonies. You are second lieutenant Michael Samson, a young gunner who has been sent to investigate the trouble in a new experimental aircraft called Nose Gunner, and you don't need me to tell you that the investigation will result in the discovery of a bunch of aliens that need to be blasted in order to protect the colonies. Knife Edge is a light gun shooter in which the game takes full control of your ship and all you have to do is move a cursor around blasting enemies: the game explains this in a positive light by saying the ship 'is automatically piloted to allow the player to devote full attention to shooting down the enemy hordes'. While you have some very limited manoeuvrability in that you can use the C buttons to nudge your ship to the side to avoid alien projectiles, for the most part it's a simple pointing and shooting exercise. To mix things up a bit, the game supports up to four players, with everyone controlling their own crosshair. You can only imagine how cramped the ship must be with four people manning the guns, though. ■

FACT

The game tries to add some variety by letting players choose multiple paths through each stage, and also adapting the route depending on how many enemies are destroyed. It claims that Stage 1 alone has more than 100 possible routes.

KNOCKOUT KINGS 2000

Year 1999
Publisher EA Sports
Developer Black Ops Entertainment

KNOCKOUT KINGS 2000 asks whether Floyd Mayweather Jr could beat Muhammad Ali in a fight. To be fair, it's a slightly unfair question given that Mayweather was only 23 and Ali was 58 when the game was released, but thankfully each of the 25 boxers featured here are depicted at the prime of their careers, meaning there are no awkward scenes in which Lennox Lewis can be seen punching a 50-something Joe Frazier's head off. The game has a Slugfest mode in which you pick from one of the legends on offer – including the likes of Sugar Ray Leonard, Oscar De La Hoya, Evander Holyfield and um… Butterbean – and put them head-to-head against another in a fast-paced, arcade-style boxing match to see who would come out on top. If you're in more of a giant-killing mood, the Career mode lets you create your own new boxer from scratch and fight your way through the ranks. The game includes a mixture of real-life and fictional arenas, ranging from Caesars Palace and Wembley Arena to the Colosseum in Rome and even a small meatpackers' union building in Detroit. As entertaining as Knockout Kings 2000 is, it's difficult to look at the Nintendo 64 version without feeling that Nintendo fans were getting a bit of a raw deal, because the PlayStation version features 50 boxers compared to the N64's 25, meaning the likes of Frank Bruno, Jake LaMotta and Rocky Marciano were exclusive to Sony's console. ■

FACT

The game is somewhat biased in that the ring announcer merely states everyone's name except for Muhammad Ali, who he also refers to as 'the greatest of all time'. So that answers that, then.

KOBE BRYANT IN NBA COURTSIDE

Year	1998	
Publisher	Nintendo	
Developer	Left Field Productions	

CALIFORNIA DEVELOPER LEFT Field Productions was originally set up in 1994 by three men who had previously worked together at Acme Interactive on Evander Holyfield's Boxing and Greatest Heavyweights. As its co-founders were basketball fans, the studio quickly released a trio of basketball games under the title Slam 'N' Jam , before Nintendo approached it to bring its expertise to its new Nintendo Sports label. Its first attempt was initially announced as NBA Courtside, but shortly before the game was completed a deal was made to associate it with 19-year-old NBA sensation Kobe Bryant. Bryant had made the NBA All-Rookie Second Team the previous season and looked like a promising young player, but it was still a bit of a gamble for Nintendo to sign up such a newcomer who hadn't actually won anything yet. Turns out it was a wise move, because Bryant would go on to become one of the greatest basketball players of all time.

NBA Courtside ticks all the boxes you'd expect of it, with all 29 officially licensed NBA teams with all their real names, logos and uniforms. Every player has their real name and likeness in the game too, with the exception of Michael Jordan (who had his own licensing deals with other games and so was known as Roster Player #98 in this game) and Latrell Sprewell (who simply isn't in the game at all, having been suspended from the league for 68 games for choking his head coach during practice, as you do). Players can take part in a pre-season exhibition game, skip to the playoffs or play through an entire season (either shorter 14-, 28- or 56-game ones, or the full 82-game affair). Rule options are detailed too, allowing you to turn on or off individual rules, so if you want to keep the shot clock and back court rules but you're not a fan of the goaltending or 3 in the key rules you can turn just those ones off. There's also support for up to four players, in whatever combination of co-op and competitive you so choose.

FACT

Nintendo couldn't let its ties with Washington sports teams go without some sort of influence here: the game's play-by-play was provided by Seattle Supersonics announcer Vic Orlando.

Nothing you've read so far will have made you think that this game is any different – at least in terms of features and modes – from any other basketball game of the era, and that's very much the case. Honourable mention, however, must go to the interesting cheat codes that can be activated on the main menu and pause screen. The big head mode speaks for itself and the ability to activate a 'disco court' which replaces the floor with huge flashing squares is pleasantly silly, but there are also three hidden teams: Left Field, Nintendo Plumbers and Nintendo Gamers. Left Field consists of the development team, while Nintendo Plumbers is made of Nintendo of America staff including producer Ken Lobb (who's now at Microsoft) and Mike Fukuda (who's now executive vice-president at Nintendo). Nintendo Gamers, meanwhile, is mostly made up of game testers and other miscellaneous staff (like the motion capture actor and packaging designer). ■

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo EAD

IT'S QUITE APPROPRIATE that time travel is the central mechanic of Majora's Mask, because the joys of alphabetical order mean it's appeared in this book before its predecessor. I would advise you, then, to turn the page and read the entry for Ocarina of Time before checking out this one. All done? Good. Set just a couple of months after the events of Ocarina of Time, a chance encounter with a strange mask-wearing chap called Skull Kid leads to Link finding himself in a new world called Termina, which is stuck in a perpetual cycle.

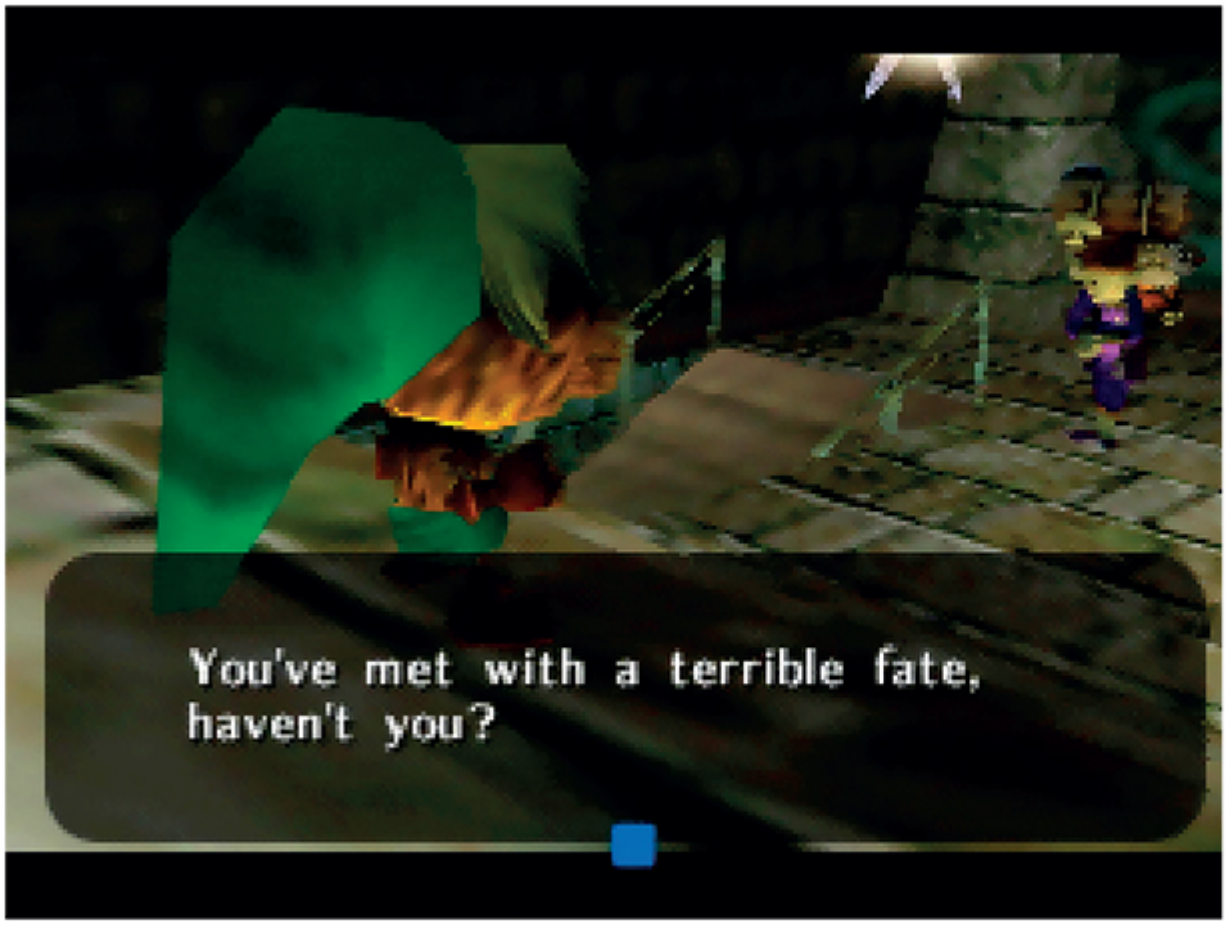
Termina is on the brink of complete annihilation. A giant moon is plummeting towards it and in 72 hours it will collide with the land, destroying everything and killing everyone with no chance of survival. As far as premises go, there have certainly been cheerier ones. Link's task is to somehow figure out a way to stop the moon's impact, and thereby save the people of Termina from utter destruction. The Ocarina comes into play again here, but this time its role is arguably even more important: by playing the Song of Time, Link can rewind everything back to the start of the 72-hour countdown, essentially giving him unlimited time to save the day as long as he keeps remembering to use it.

Although rewinding time will see the player keeping every major item they've collected along the way some smaller items will be lost, solved puzzles will be undone and all of Termina's residents will act like they've never met Link before. Because technically they haven't, after all. The trick, then, is to continue playing through these 72-hour cycles, finding out more about the residents as you do and eventually gathering the items you need to solve each of their individual problems until a way to save the world is discovered.

FACT

A dataminer discovered in 2021 that the position of the stars in the sky in Majora's Mask depends on the player's file name. So Chris, Louise and Serena, for example, would all have different star patterns in the sky.

One of the other main gimmicks in Majora's Mask is the ability to collect other masks, which enable Link to transform into different species and gain their powers. The Deku Mask, for example, turns him into a plant-like Deku Scrub, which lets him skip on the surface of water and fly for a while. The Goron Mask, meanwhile, turns him into a giant Goron monster, allowing him to roll around at high speed, walk through lava without taking damage and perform massively powerful punches. Finally, the Zora mask lets him walk at the bottom of water and swim quickly. Naturally, the idea is that you have to switch between these masks when the need arises to gain access to areas that are otherwise inaccessible.



Majora's Mask is considered one of the high points of the Zelda series, and is easily among the darkest of Link's adventures. Although it doesn't quite have the legacy of Ocarina of Time, that's likely because it was played by significantly fewer people. There are very few people who, after playing through it, don't immediately place it near the top of their list of their all-time favourite Zelda games. ■

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

Year 1998
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD

AS A LAUNCH game, Super Mario 64 was a fantastic way of showing players how a popular genre like the platformer could be revolutionised through the jump from 2D to 3D. It would be another two years before Nintendo could finally show how the same could be done for Zelda's action adventure genre, and the results were arguably even more transformative and influential. The game opens with a young Link having a nightmare about an evil man chasing a young girl on horseback. Link is woken by a fairy called Navi who takes him to the Great Deku Tree, which is dying. The Deku Tree tells Link to head to Hyrule Castle to speak to Zelda, who informs him that the man in question is Ganondorf, and he's trying to steal the holy Triforce to gain its power. Tus begins an epic adventure in which Link has to find the Triforce before Ganondorf can get to it. There's more to the story than that, but if you're one of those people fortunate enough to have not played this game yet, and for whom all of it is still an outstanding adventure waiting to be discovered, I couldn't possibly say any more.

The game's central mechanic revolves around time. The Temple of Time allows Link to jump forwards and backwards seven years, aging between a young and adult version in the process. Ganondorf has already found the Triforce in the future, meaning players are constantly exposed to a jarring difference between the lush, thriving landscapes of Hyrule in the past and the desolate, lifeless wasteland it's become in the future, with zombie-like Redeads roaming around. Link can also use his titular ocarina to play a variety of songs that trigger various spells, some of which also have time-manipulating powers: the Sun's Song lets you change from day to night, for example, while the Song of Time can be used to make special blocks appear in some dungeons.

FACT

An Arwing from Star Fox is actually stored in the game's code, and if you spawn it using a cheat cartridge it'll actually fly around and attack you. It appears to be a placeholder for Volvagia, a dragon boss who flies similarly.

This game-specific gimmickry takes a back seat, however, to the general structure of the game itself, which was unlike anything seen before at the time. By modern standards Hyrule Field is fairly small and lacking in areas of interest, but back in 1998 it was a vast expanse of land brimming with possibilities and the excitement in knowing that you had the freedom to explore any of it. The open-world structure was also supported by a contextual control system, where prompts at the top of the screen would show players what each button did at any time, and even allowed them to assign certain inventory tools to specific C-buttons, essentially customising their control scheme on the fly. Ocarina of Time's impact on video games is such that entire books have been written on it, so attempting to sum it up in a single page is mere folly. If you've somehow managed to avoid playing it up to this point, however, you're advised to try it out: it's aged a bit these days, but its influence is still clear to see. ■

LEGO RACERS

Year 1999
Publisher Lego Media
Developer High Voltage Software

THE MAJORITY OF Lego games these days tend to be focused on some sort of licenced tie-in, but Lego Racers was created at a time when the company's own themed series were its best selling products. The game consists of three circuits, which essentially act like the Grand Prix events in Mario Kart and have four tracks in each. Once you clear all three circuits you gain access to a further three, which provide mirror versions of the previous 12 tracks. Each track is also represented by a character from one of Lego's various sets at the time, such as Pirates, Egypt, Dark Forest, Exploriens and Royal Knights. As you win each race you'll unlock its representative who's added to your roster. More interestingly, however, their parts and pieces are then added to a collection which can be used to create your own LEGO racer from scratch. After choosing their head and body parts you then get to design their car by selecting a chassis and placing individual blocks on it. Each block affects the balance and handling of your car, meaning there are plenty of possibilities. Its weapons system is also quite original, allowing players to collect coloured blocks for specific weapons then either fire them as is, or wait to pick up special white blocks which upgrade them. The actual racing in Lego Racers wasn't anything to write home about, but its inventive features made it much more than a half-hearted Mario Kart clone. ■

FACT

Every character in the game, with the exception of the final boss Rocket Racer and the time trial competitor Veronica Voltage, was a real Lego minifigure which featured in one of Lego's own sets.

LODE RUNNER 3-D

Year 1999
Publisher Infogrames / Banpresto
Developer Big Bang

BELIEVE IT OR not, there had already been 20 different games in the Lode Runner series before this Nintendo 64 exclusive was developed. The story this time revolves around the mad Emperor Monk of Pandora, who has been hijacking the gold shipments that are being sent to the rich Out-Sector Colonies, destroying their economies in the process. As a member of the Lode Runners, your mission is to enter the Emperor's realm, recover the stolen gold, defeat the Emperor himself and get back to Earth alive: all just to make sure some wealthy people don't go through a recession. There are five worlds in the game, each split into a number of smaller stages which can be located via teleports. The aim is simply to enter each stage (all of which are presented in a 2.5D style), collect all the gold there, avoid the enemy monks wandering around and teleport the hell out of there again so you can move onto the next area. As in other Lode Runner games, you're armed with an unusual gun that can only be fired downwards to destroy blocks on the floor directly in front of you. Players have to plan in advance, then, to figure out which blocks to destroy in order to get past certain obstacles. They eventually respawn, which can be used to your advantage: digging a hole and trapping your enemy in it will kill them when the block reappears on top of them. ■

FACT

In 1985, a Lode Runner competition was held at the Japan's World Fair, where 50 people tried to get a high score on a 80-foot-tall Sony Jumbotron screen (which was the world's biggest at the time).

MACE: THE DARK AGE

Year 1997
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Atari Games

IT'S THE ELEVENTH century and everything is going down the tubes. Genghis Khan and his Golden Horde are laying waste to most of Asia, the Assassins' Guild is killing sultans and kings left and right in Arabia, and Europe is permanently struggling with war and oppression. The reason all this is happening is the Covenant of Seven, a group of leaders who have made a deal with the evil Asmodeus, a dark warlord who wields the Mace of Tanis. The Mace gives anyone who holds it everlasting life and infinite power, so with Asmodeus on their side the Covenant of Seven are in charge. Naturally, being bad guys they start getting greedy, so they send their best warriors out to kill Asmodeus and take the Mace themselves. At the same time, leaders of defeated nations in the East decide to send their own warriors to kill him too before he can do more damage. The result is a straightforward fighting game in which a selection of fighters kick lumps out of each other with big weapons. There are more than a few nods to Mortal Kombat here, particularly the way in which opponents stand stunned for a brief while after you defeat them so you can perform a fatality move on them. One nice touch, however, is the way in which its stages have more interactivity than most fighting games. Objects can be used as weapons and some stages have hazard areas (like deep pools of water) that drain your health the longer you stay in them. ■

FACT

The motion capture was performed by a developer who, luckily, was also a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism, a living history group dedicated to recreating culture from the Middle Ages.

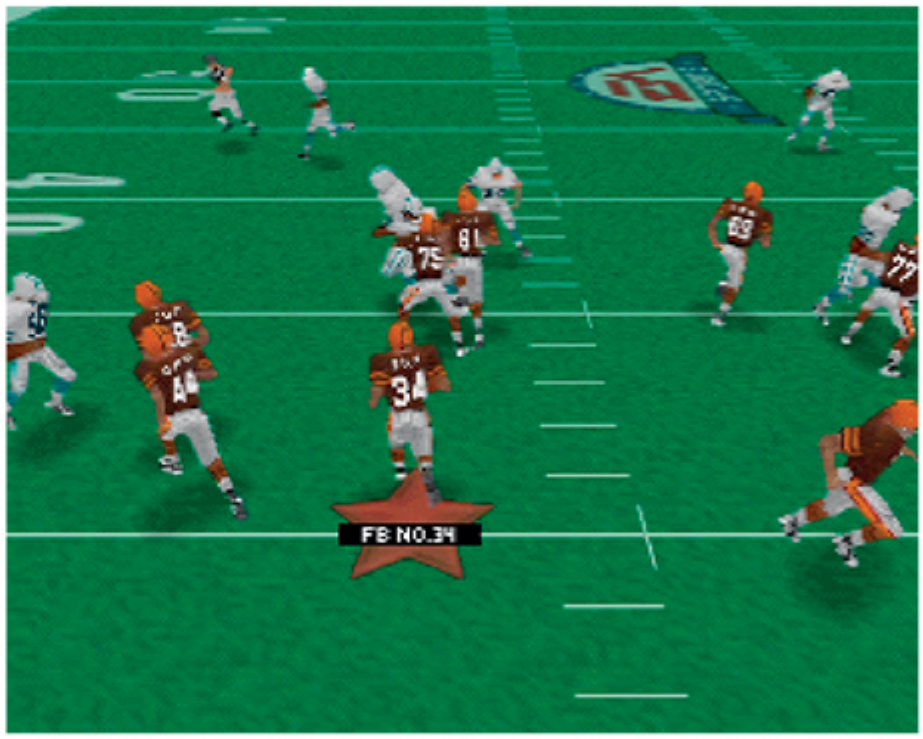
MADDEN FOOTBALL 64

Year 1997
Publisher EA Sports
Developer Tiburon Entertainment

WHEN THE NINTENDO 64 launched, EA stated that it had no interest in releasing its sports titles on Nintendo's console. Then, in March 1997, it did a complete U-turn and announced that it had signed a multi-year contract to release a line of EA Sports games for the N64. Just seven months later, in October 1997, Madden 64 was sitting proudly on store shelves. How did it manage to turn the game around so quickly? Simple: Madden 64 was an enhanced port of the PlayStation title Madden NFL 98 which had been released a few months earlier. In one sense it was an improved offering over the one on Sony's console: whereas Madden NFL 98's players were 2D sprites on a 3D field, Madden 64's players were all fully polygonal. There was one notable drawback, though, and if you've studied both games' titles intently you may have already noticed it. According to EGM magazine, Acclaim had secured exclusive rights to the NFL licence on Nintendo 64 for the remainder of the season, and as such EA had to go without it for Madden 64. This meant no real team names and logos, but player names were at least still correct thanks to the NFLPA licence. Other than playing a little slower than the PlayStation game and lacking its FMV video clips of John Madden during season mode, Madden's N64 debut was otherwise a perfectly accomplished, fully featured title and a decent start for the series on the system. Now it just had to get that licence back. ■

FACT

John Madden wrote a number of books throughout his career, the first of which was brilliantly named *Hey, Wait a Minute, I Wrote a Book*.



MADDEN NFL 99

Year 1998
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Tiburon

WITH ACCLAIM'S NFL exclusivity deal on Nintendo 64 only lasting one year, EA was able to provide players with the full NFL-riddled experience in time for the second N64 Madden game. Naturally, then, Madden NFL 99 featured every current NFL team, logos and all, as well as a bunch of classic teams for a total of 120. The other main change for this year's game was a switch to a hi-res graphics mode, allowing for more visual detail (but a slightly clunky frame rate as a result). There's a new Arcade mode – which features fewer rules and gives you fewer plays to choose from, making things move a bit quicker – and a new one-button mode, in case you want to do the bare minimum and still have it count. ■

FACT

This writer's beloved Cleveland Browns were still a season away from returning to the NFL after a four-year absence at this point, but players could enter WELCOMEBACK as a cheat code to unlock them early.

MADDEN NFL 2000

Year 1999
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Tiburon

MADDEN NFL 2000 was more of a general improvement rather than a revolutionary new take on the sport (though some would argue that's usually the case with annual sports iterations). The framerate is noticeably improved compared to the previous year's entry, and the graphics were tweaked to allow for greater detail, including visibly different player heights and weights and other little touches like nets behind the goals and people standing on the sidelines. Most critics, however, pointed out that the main difference was the improved running game, which made it easier to find and expose defensive games and make use of the tweaked juke move. Most importantly of all, of course, the Cleveland Browns were back, making it the best N64 Madden to date by default. ■

FACT

One particularly odd cheat code in Madden 2000 is WOOGIEWOOGIE, which electrifies the sidelines. Any players stepping out of bounds are flung high into the air.

MADDEN NFL 2001

Year 2000
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Tiburon

AS WELL AS the usual tweaks to graphics and gameplay, Madden NFL 2001's main new feature was Madden Cards, a clever system that predated achievements and trophies by a number of years. Players have a list of challenges they can perform – ranging from simple stuff to completing a 20-yard run to harder things like intercepting five passes in a game – and are rewarded with tokens each time they manage it. These tokens can then be spent on packs of cards which unlock classic teams, fictional teams (including ones made up of mummies and cowboys), new stadiums, boosts for current players and legendary players (who are added to the Free Agents roster and can be signed for your team). A great feature. ■

FACT

This was the first game in the series to feature a player, rather than John Madden himself, as the main image on the cover in all regions (it had been happening in PAL regions since Madden 99).

MADDEN NFL 2002

Year 2001
Publisher EA Sports
Developer Budcat Creations

AS THE LAST Madden game on the N64, the changes to the main game were minimal, with the most notable addition being the latest expansion team, the Houston Texans. The newest feature, however, technically wasn't something 'new' at all, but nine years old. An option on the main menu called Madden Classic takes you to an emulated version of the Sega Mega Drive / Genesis game Madden NFL 93, but with all the teams and players updated to the current rosters. Emulation of previous-gen games was extremely hit and miss at the turn of the millennium (rare as it was), but the port of Madden NFL 93 here is surprisingly silky smooth and a great way to play a classic game. Oh, and the main game was still fine too. ■

FACT

A cheat code unlocks five special teams, each of whom has a sneaky move: punching, teleporting, gliding, being impossible to tackle, and making opponents disappear and stealing their ball.

MAGICAL TETRIS CHALLENGE

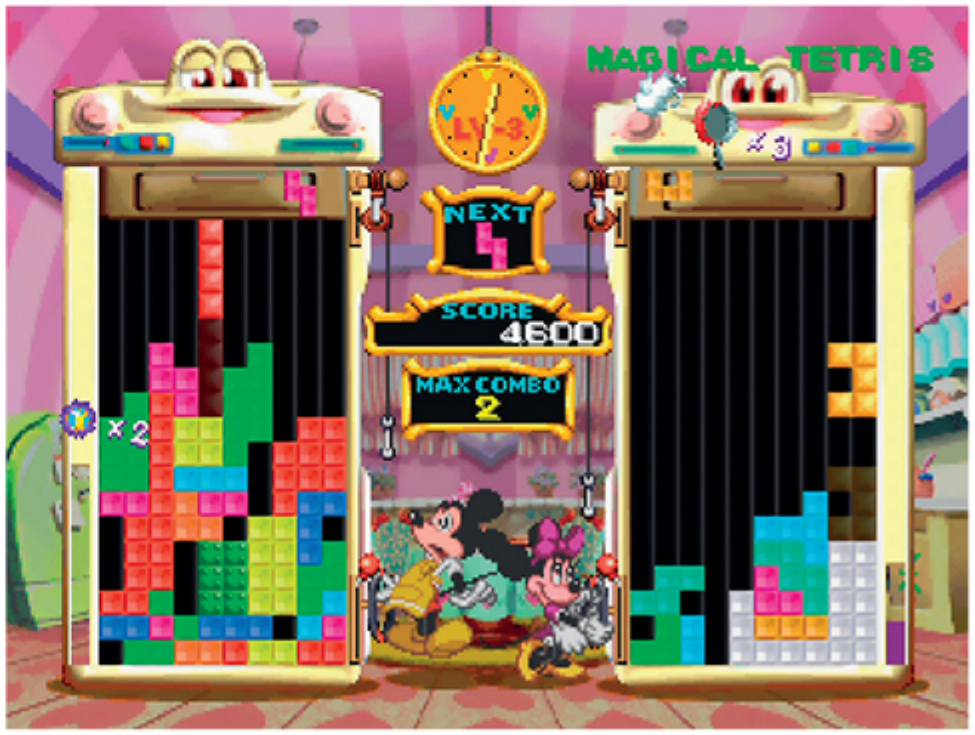
Year 1998
Publisher Capcom / Activision
Developer Capcom

IF YOU'VE EVER played Tetris and thought to yourself 'what this game really needs is Mickey Mouse', then Magical Tetris Challenge is the answer to all your prayers (as long as your prayers are limited to that specific thought you just had). The game's main feature is its Story mode, where players can choose between four characters, each with their own separate story. It all revolves around Donald, whose story sees him finding a glowing gemstone while fishing, then giving pieces to his friends while trying to find out what it is. Minnie's story has her trying to get her piece turned into a pendant, while Goofy wants to turn his into a emblem for his car. Meanwhile, Mickey is trying to rescue Minnie from Pete, who's used some of the pendant's magical power to brainwash her into marrying him. There are two main types of competitive Tetris to choose from:

FACT

Magical Tetris Challenge was the only western N64 game to also appear in Japanese arcades on the Aleck 64, an arcade system developed by Seta which was essentially a modified N64 in a cabinet.

Updown Tetris is little more than an unusual name for the standard two-player Tetris contest where clearing multiple lines will send extra lines over to your opponent's screen. Magical Tetris, meanwhile, mixes things up a little: instead of sending lines to your opponent, you give them a variety of awkward shapes to use, such as five-block 'pentominoes' or huge pieces (up to 5x5 in size) to mess up their cleanly stacked areas. If you aren't into all these head-to-head hijinks, there's also a Classic Tetris mode for solo players. ■



MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL FEATURING KEN GRIFFEY JR

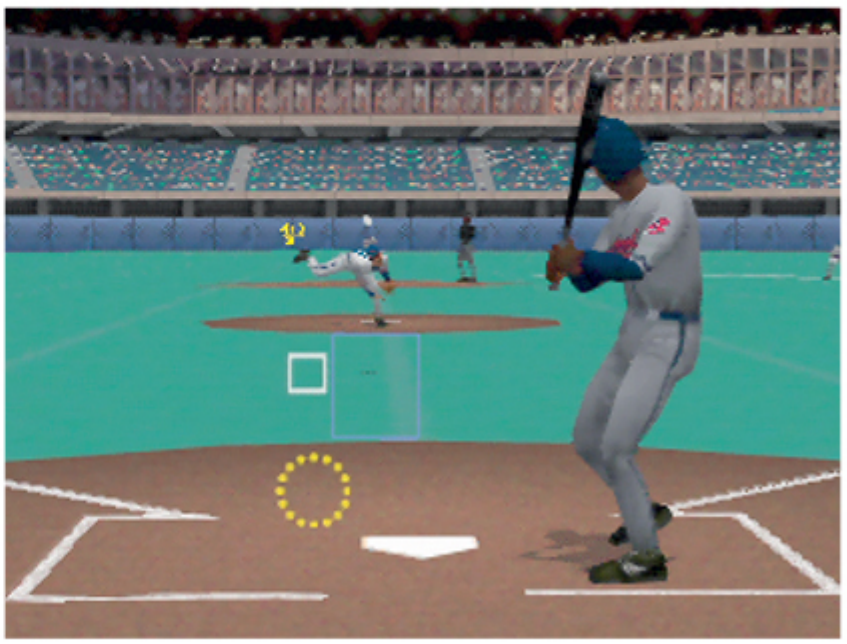
Year 1998
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Angel Studios

THE JOYS OF alphabetical order mean you're now reading about the first Nintendo 64 game featuring Ken Griffey Jr after I've already detailed the second one, Ken Griffey Jr's Slugfest, and the backstory behind it (Nintendo's ownership of the Seattle Mariners and such). If you missed that, then, I'd recommend you check it out first: instead, here's what Major League Baseball had (or rather didn't have) compared to its successor. As the title makes clear, it did still boast the full Major League Baseball licence, with all team names, logos, uniforms, stadiums and player names and likenesses intact. It was also similarly arcade-like in nature, offering a more fast-paced rendition of the sport than the All-Star Baseball series, which felt more like simulators. There are two notable differences when you put Major League Baseball next to Slugfest, however, and they're both visual ones. Firstly,

FACT

Ken Griffey Jr was one of the nine MLB players who starred in the much-loved 'Homer at the Bat' episode of *The Simpsons*. He's the one who ended up with a 'grotesquely swollen jaw'.

Major League Baseball doesn't sport the hi-res graphical mode its successor does, meaning it's noticeably blurrier by comparison (and it doesn't support the Expansion Pak either, like Slugfest did). Secondly, while Slugfest introduced a separate camera angle for pitching which placed the camera behind the pitcher, that isn't the case in Major League Baseball and instead you've always got the batter-focused camera sitting over home plate regardless of whether you're batting or pitching. Both Major League Baseball and its sequel offered fun enough arcadey takes on the sport, but if you don't have either and are thinking of buying one, Slugfest is naturally the superior title. ■



MARIO GOLF

Year 1999
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Camelot Software Planning

IT MAY BE hard now to think of a time when there were no Mario sports games developed by Camelot, but prior to the summer of 1999 that's exactly the awful, despair-ridden situation the world found itself in. We did have Mario's Tennis on the Virtual Boy first, of course, but given that the console's abject failure meant it sold fewer copies than a bankrupt bootlegger, the vast majority of the planet was still unaware of it, hence all the aforementioned despair. Thankfully, humanity was redeemed with the arrival of Mario Golf, the first major Mario sports title: the foremost one, if you will (and I definitely will).

Bizarrely, for a game that features Mario's name in the title, the main man himself isn't actually playable from the start. Instead players can only choose between four different golfers – Princess Peach, Baby Mario and two fictional human characters Charlie and Plum – and have to unlock the others. The Get Character mode has you playing against one of the unlockable characters, and if you beat them they'll be added to the roster. Even then, Mario still takes a while to show up: in order, the characters you unlock are Luigi, Yoshi, Sonny (another fictional human), Wario, Harry (yet another human) and then Mario finally appears as the sixth (with Bowser following shortly afterwards).

You also only start off with one course, Toad's Highlands, which is a standard enough golf course that wouldn't look out of place in any other non-Mario golf game (other than the occasional Toad House sitting nearby, of course). As you play through the game's various modes you'll earn Course Points which can then be used to unlock the other five courses: Koopa Park, Shy Guy Desert, Yoshi's Island, Boo Valley and Mario's Star. There are also two mini-golf courses – Luigi's Garden and Peach's Castle – which have short putting greens shaped like numbers and letters of the alphabet.

FACT

Outraged by the fact that Peach plays with a short skirt? It's actually her normal dress rolled up. Score an Eagle, Albatross or Hole in One and when she celebrates it'll unravel to its full length.

Mario Golf is one of a few Nintendo 64 games to use the Transfer Pak, a special peripheral that plugs into the N64 controller and allows you to import data from Game Boy Color games: in this case, the GBC version of Mario Golf which followed a month or so later. The handheld game had a fantastic RPG style mode where players could choose one of four fictional human characters (of course) and level them up. These characters – Kid, Azalea, Sherry and Joe – were all exclusive to the GBC version so by connecting the game to the Transfer Pak players could import them to the N64 game (just in case they felt like it could do with some more non-Mario golfers).

Mario personalities and data-transferring gimmickry aside, what really made Mario Golf so well-loved was the actual golfing itself. Although its standard 'three-press meter' was far from an original control system, Camelot nailed the general feel so well and made sure it was flexible enough that complete beginners could make their way through the game while experts could take time to master it. ■

MARIO KART 64

Year 1996
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD

THERE HAVE BEEN very few times in gaming history that a console's new feature has benefited a series more dramatically than the impact that the introduction of four controller ports had on Mario Kart. Although the original Super Mario Kart on the SNES was much loved, the game was limited to one-player or two-player modes, and as such the possibilities for multiplayer racing were relatively limited, especially in a party setting. With the addition of four-player support on the N64 console as standard, Mario Kart 64 took full advantage of this and the results completely transformed the experience: with four players taking part a new layer of unpredictability was incorporated, fully establishing the more 'madcap' racing the Mario Kart series would become known for.

Four-player racing may have been the biggest new addition in this, the second Mario Kart game, but it certainly wasn't the only one. Indeed, Mario Kart 64 is packed with new ideas and features that would become staples of the series going forwards. One of these was the ability to charge up a boost while drifting, something which wasn't possible in the original Super Mario Kart. By hopping into a jump and wiggling the Control Stick while sliding, the smoke coming out of the player's wheels would change colour, allowing players to boost out of the drift. Although this mechanic was made much easier to pull off in later games, it was nevertheless here that the prototype began for a technique that would become vital for mastery of the game in the future.

The infamous Spiny Shell (more colloquially known as the blue shell), which would become one of the most iconic and devious weapons in video game history, also made its debut in Mario Kart 64. Players could fire it forwards, at which point it would slide around the track, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake, until it reached the racer in first place and rammed itself into their rump for their troubles. In the GameCube, DS and Wii Mario Kart games, the blue shell would instead fly through the sky, ignoring all the other racers before landing on the leader. Nintendo eventually realised Mario Kart 64 had the right idea and made it low-flying again in Mario Kart 7 on the 3DS and every subsequent game.

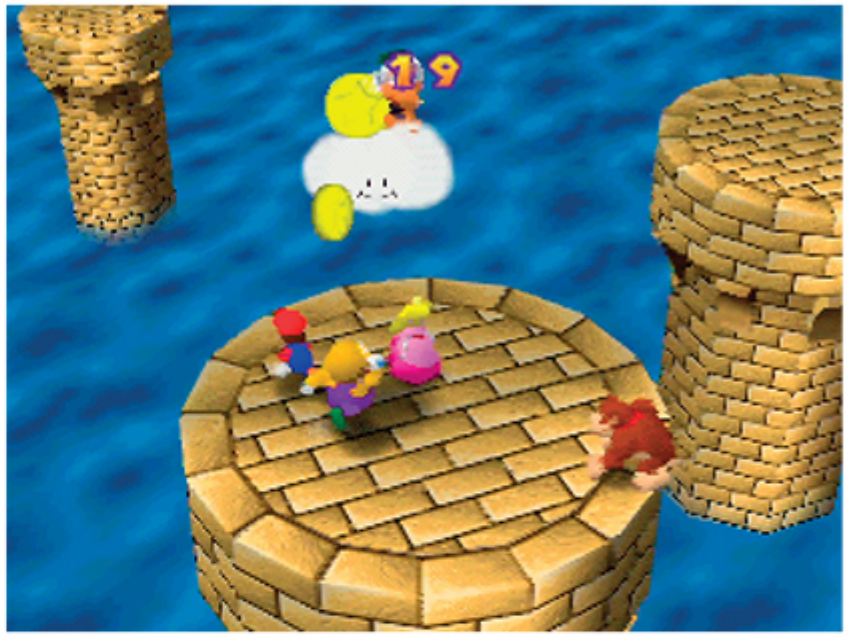
FACT

An early version of the game named Mario Kart R had Kamek the Magikoopa as a playable character. To this day, he still hasn't appeared as a playable character in the main series.

Perhaps the most obvious change, though, was the ditching of the SNES original's Mode 7 graphics in favour of polygonal tracks. Whereas Mode 7 was an impressive optical illusion giving the impression of 3D, the fact it was just a big rotating sprite meant tracks were all flat and lacked depth. With the switch to polygonal courses, players could now enjoy the likes of massive jumps in Wario Stadium, the multi-tiered battlefield that was Block Fort and the looping, swooping multi-coloured joy that was Rainbow Road. It may not quite have that same 'pick up and play' charm that recent Mario Kart games offer, but Mario Kart 64 was an extremely important addition to the series, one that transformed it from a one-off novelty to a legitimate top-tier Nintendo franchise. ■

MARIO PARTY

Year	1998
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Hudson Soft



MARIO SPORTS GAMES weren't the only tradition that started life on the Nintendo 64. The long-running Mario Party series also originated on the system, with those four controller ports once again proving to be the essential spark that enabled a new franchise to form. Mario Party's central concept is that of a board game where players choose a character from the Mario series and compete against each other to try and end up with the most Stars once a set number of turns are over. Whoever does is the 'Super Star' and will spend the rest of their life taunting their pals mercilessly. Probably.

In this first entry, there are six characters to choose from – Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach, Yoshi, Wario and Donkey Kong – with all six playing exactly the same and not boasting any strengths or weaknesses (except for the fact that Wario is the coolest, obviously). There are also initially six boards to play, each with their own special features. Mario's Rainbow Castle is set in the sky, and Bowser regularly appears to sell players fake 'Ztars', essentially stealing their coins. DK's Jungle Adventure has rolling boulders and Whomps guarding junctions. Peach's Birthday Cake is a small board where players can plant seeds which grow into Piranha Plants and steal opponents' Stars. Yoshi's Tropical Island is made of two main islands with Twomps in the middle charging a fee to cross between them. Wario's Battle Canyon has five circular mini-boards and is set in the middle of a Bob-omb civil war. Finally, Luigi's Engine Room has a bunch of doors that can rise and fall to mess up players' routes. Eventually two more boards – Bowser's Magma Mountain and Eternal Star – can be unlocked, bringing the total to a healthy eight.

FACT

Some games involve spinning the Control Stick as fast as possible. Players who used the palms of their hands often got blisters, so Nintendo eventually agreed to send special gloves to players for a limited time.

The boards are only half the story, however. What truly makes Mario Party so entertaining is the inclusion of mini-games after each turn. These are split into 2v2, 1v3 and four-player categories, and players compete to earn coins which can be spent on various items on the board (especially the Stars they need to win). There are 39 of these in the main boards, ranging from Balloon Burst (where players try to inflate and burst a Bowser balloon first) to Handcar Havoc (where pairs take part in a minecart race). If you're a loner there's also a single-player mode called Mini-Game Island, where you have to beat every mini-game including 10 unique solo-only ones. If you can manage to make your way through Mini-Game Island, you'll unlock Bumper Ball Maze, the 50th and final mini-game.

There aren't many games that make such an impact that they affect entire genres, but while there were a number of titles before Mario Party that could retrospectively be considered 'party' games (such as Bomberman and Enix's Itadaki Street series in Japan), it's fair to say that Mario Party's impact certainly inspired the vast majority of similar games that followed in its sizeable wake. ■

MARIO PARTY 2

Year	1999
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Hudson Soft

ONE DAY, MARIO and his chums decide to build a new theme park (as you do). After creating its six separate areas, Mario takes it upon himself to decide the park should be named Mario Land (clearly not aware of the Game Boy series of the same name). Naturally, the others aren't too keen on the idea of Mario taking centre stage, and other names are thrown into the mix: nothing revolutionary, just stuff like Wario Land, Peach Land, Yoshi Land, but it's the principle of the thing. Eventually Toad decides to put an end to the fight by telling the group: 'Hey, shut your collective mouths and let's Mario Party the hell out of this to settle it' (not actual dialogue).

The same six characters from the first game return in Mario Party 2, and there are six new boards to play on, with most of them based on a specific theme this time rather than named after each character. Pirate Land takes place across a series of islands, and players can use a shark called Sushi to take shortcuts to other parts of the board. Western Land, meanwhile, takes place in a town located at the bottom of a desert canyon and features a train called Steamer – who has a moustache because why not – who can transport players quickly around the board for a fee (and can also run over unlucky players in his way). Space Land features a timer which counts down every time a player crosses a certain point, and when it hits zero Bowser will fire a laser at the board, causing anyone it hits to lose all their coins. Mystery Land takes place in a jungle with four separate boards, as well as a Curse House where a Shy Guy can be paid to 'curse' an opponent and give them low dice rolls. Horror Land has a day and night mechanic where certain areas on the board act differently depending on the time. Finally, Bowser Land has a parade which runs after every five turns, knocking over anyone in its path. One of the fun gimmicks this time is that each board also decks its characters out in certain outfits, so if you've ever wanted to see Mario and co dressed up as a pirate, cowboy, astronaut, archaeologist or wizard then you're in luck.

FACT

Game Informer magazine gave the first two Mario Party games scores of 3.5 and 5.25 out of 10. Nintendo responded by sending a certificate showing appreciation 'for their well-written and glowing reviews'.

There are now 65 mini-games to be found, 21 of which have been carried over from the original Mario Party. New additions include Cake Factory, where pairs team up to make as many cakes as they can, and Archer-ival, where one player is armed with a bow and arrow and the other three have to move targets to avoid being hit. There are also now a handful of 1v1 duel mini-games, which can be initiated when a player uses a new Dueling Glove item. The single-player mode this time is called Mini-Game Coaster, but while the general concept is the same as before, it needs to be unlocked this time. ■

MARIO PARTY 3

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Hudson Soft

AS THE NINTENDO 64 neared the end of his life, there was still time for one more Mario Party. This time the plot revolves around the Millennium Star (look, everything was about the millennium back then), a special star that's only born once every thousand years. Because the Millennium Star is a newborn, it falls from the sky and lands with a thump on the ground. Mario and his friends start arguing about who should get to keep the star, and before long – because apparently every argument in the Mushroom Kingdom is resolved with Mario Party – it's once again decided that this is the only way for the group to decide who the star's rightful owner should be. Suddenly, the star transports them all inside a magical toy box, and tells the chums that whoever can collect seven Star Stamps in its various worlds will become the top superstar in the universe.

Mario Party 3 is the first game in the series to have a proper single-player Story mode, rather than a linear mode where solo players have to simply play through all the mini-games in order. This time the Story mode has them choosing a character – once again, the same six from the previous games are on offer – and actually taking part in the main board games. By winning each one, players will then face off against other characters and earn their Star Stamps. It's here where the game's new Dual Boards feature comes into play.

FACT

The back of the box says 'you can even unlock characters in the one-player challenge', but you can't. Wario and Daisy were going to be locked characters, but it was decided at the last minute to make them unlocked from the start.

These are six special, smaller boards which are designed with only two players in mind. As well as taking on your opponent, you also get to team up with a partner who supports you with various abilities. Partner with Toad, for example, and he'll hit opponents with his hammer, while teaming up with the Piranha Plant sees opponents being swept up by his legs. Well, his vines, you know what I mean.

If solo play isn't your thing and you want to stick with the traditional Mario Party four-player mode, the game chucks in two new characters who aren't available in Story mode (because they're part of the story), Princess Daisy and Waluigi. As for the mini-games, there are now 71 to choose from, and whereas Mario Party 2 borrowed some from the first game, this time every one of them is brand new. This also includes 10 duel mini-games, which can only be accessed in the two-player mode. Although the game received praise from critics for continuing to offer solid multiplayer fun, some criticism was labelled at the single-player mode because of the amount of watching players had to do. After all, when you're taking part in a four-player board game and you have to sit there and watch CPU opponents playing for three quarters of the time, that can get a little time-consuming when there's no option to skip or speed up the process. Still, as Nintendo's last game on the N64 in the west, it was a decent final bow as it prepared for the GameCube. ■

MARIO TENNIS

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Camelot Software Planning

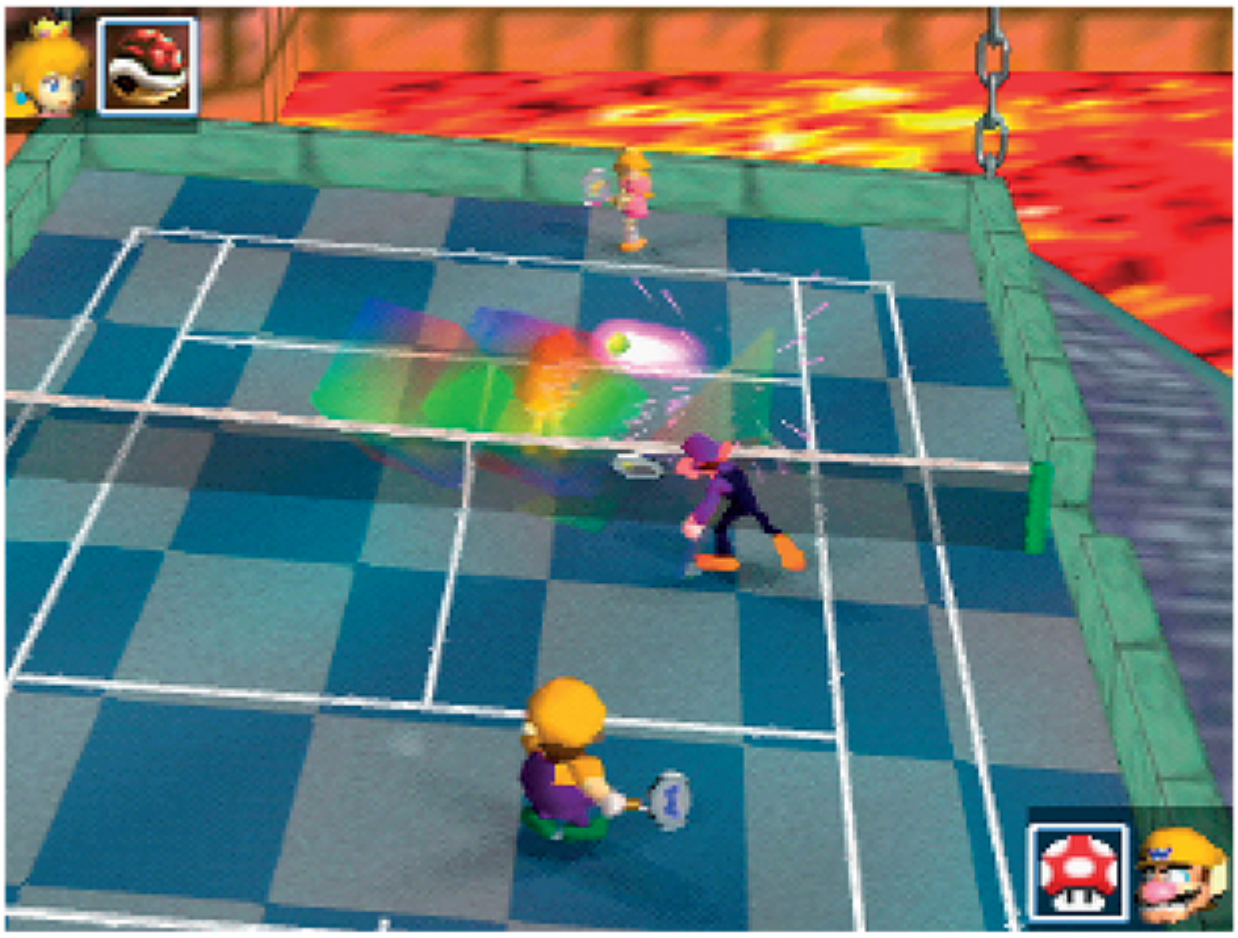
THE SUCCESS OF Mario Golf in 1999 meant Mario's sporting career was off and running. Nintendo and Camelot wasted no time in getting Mario and chums to step out of their golfing plus fours and into their tennis shirts, with Mario Tennis releasing roughly a year later. Whereas Mario Golf had an unconventional approach to the way characters were unlocked (to the extent that Mario himself didn't actually turn up for a while), Mario Tennis did away with all the nonsense and made things far more straightforward. There are 14 characters available from the start, split into different categories: all-around (Mario and Luigi), technique (Peach, Daisy, Toad and Waluigi), power (Wario, Bowser and Donkey Kong) and speed (Yoshi, Birdo and Baby Mario). Players can then unlock two more characters, Shy Guy and Donkey Kong Jr, through normal play. If that all sounds a bit too sensible and you're craving the bizarre inclusion of human characters like Mario Golf had, you can also use a Transfer Pak to connect to the Game Boy Color version of Mario Tennis and carry over the four human characters from its RPG mode, bringing the total roster to 20.

As with Mario Golf, one of the reasons Mario Tennis was so successful is because its actual gameplay mechanics are quite restrained. This is a tennis game first and foremost that happens to have Mario characters in it, rather than a Mario game that tries to shoehorn tennis into its formula. As such, at its foundation is a solid, well-made tennis sim that's once again designed to appeal to both beginners and pros. There are only two buttons used, one for topspin strokes and one for slices, but once players get the hang of the basics they can then pull off more advanced strokes by quickly pressing A, B or B, A for a lob or a drop shot respectively. In this way, the game gives players a wider repertoire of techniques without intimidating newcomers with too many buttons.

FACT

You might think 'Luigi' is doing most of the heavy lifting in Waluigi's name, but it's not. Wario is a portmanteau of 'warui' (Japanese for 'bad') and Mario, so Waluigi is a mix of 'warui' and Luigi. The Luigi part is actually only 'gi'.

Most of the courts are standard affairs, with no gimmicks or gizmos, and while you can unlock a bunch of extra ones they mostly just have different designs. Things only get wacky when you play one of the three special match types: Ring Shot (where players build up points by hitting the ball through giant rings that float above the court), Piranha Challenge (where you have to hit 50 balls spat at you by Piranha Plants) and Bowser Stage (which takes place on a floating, tilting court which features power-ups). For the most part, though, you'll be taking part in straightforward tennis, and it works well. While Mario Tennis will go down as a great tennis game, it's perhaps more notable in Nintendo's history for marking the debut of a certain character. Each character has their own doubles partner in the game: Mario and Luigi, Bowser and Boo, Birdo and Yoshi, that sort of thing. Since Wario didn't have an obvious partner, Waluigi was born. The world was never the same again. ■



MEGA MAN 64

Year 2000
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom Production Studio 2

OF ALL THE publishers transitioning their franchises from 2D to 3D, Capcom perhaps had the trickiest job with Mega Man. A series flamed for its tight 2D platforming and its need for split-second jumping and shooting skills, it was always going to be extremely difficult to accurately transfer those qualities over to 3D polygonal environments. Its solution was a simple one: let's not bother. Instead, it created Mega Man Legends, a standalone series that focused more on exploration and plot. The first game, simply titled Mega Man Legends, was released on PlayStation in 1997, and Mega Man 64 is a direct port of that game (albeit one released a few years later).

The game is set in the distant future, where the world has flooded and only a bunch of small islands remain. Natural resources are scarce: the only way people can survive is with 'refractors', a powerful energy source located in ancient ruins deep underground and sourced by specialists known as Diggers. One day a popular Digger called Barrell Casket finds a baby in an archaeological site. Barrell brings the baby home to live with his family, including his granddaughter Roll, who suggests he should be named Mega Man after one of her favourite video game characters (how meta). And so the story of Mega Man Volnutt begins… or does it? That would be telling, of course.

Whereas the previous 2D Mega Man games tended to follow the typical routine of progressing through a series of linear stages and taking on robot bosses, Mega Man 64 is instead a 3D action-adventure game where the player explores a variety of open locations, most notably an island called Kattelox, which is said to have a secret treasure. On his travels Mega Man has to put a stop to the Bonnes, a group of pirates who want to steal Kattelox's treasure, despite the terrible fate that will befall the island if they do. Naturally, this means there's still combat here, though the third dimension makes it very different from previous Mega Man games, with Mega Man able to sidestep and roll out of the way to avoid enemy attacks while also being able to lock onto specific foes. It wouldn't be a Mega Man game without the ability to gain new weapons, and things at least haven't changed in that respect, though the process of earning them has: instead of winning them from bosses you defeat, they're instead built by Roll with objects you find.

FACT

Mega Man Legends got a PlayStation sequel in 2000. A third game was planned for the 3DS in 2011, but it was cancelled just as a playable demo was about to be released.

Mega Man 64 was generally well received and while it was certainly a huge change from what fans of the series were used to, it still gained enough of a following of its own to lead to future games in the Mega Man Legends series. The N64 version in particular, however, received reviews that were somewhat less positive, mainly because the game was a three-year-old PlayStation title by the time it reached Nintendo's system and hadn't really been improved in any way. ■

MIA HAMM SOCCER 64

Year 2000
Publisher SouthPeak Interactive
Developer Silicon Dreams Studio

BRITISH DEVELOPER SILICON Dreams had seen some success with its polygonal football game Olympic Soccer, and subsequently with its World League Soccer series. As it prepared to bring the latter to the Nintendo 64 for the first time with WLS 2000, however (see below), publisher SouthPeak noticed the huge increase in popularity in women's football in the US, mainly because of the national team winning the Women's World Cup in 1999. The decision was made to take WLS 2000 and repurpose it for North America, turning it from a men's football game starring Michael Owen to a women's football game starring US captain and striker Mia Hamm. There was a lot more to it than simply slapping new character models in there: in a 2015 interview with *Vice* the game's lead programmer Mark Greenshields explained that the team had to completely replace many of the motion-captured animations in WLS 2000 with hand-animated animations to make sure the women didn't run like men. The commentary was also changed, with Peter Brackley's WLS 2000 soundbites swapped out for all-new lines by Wendy Gebauer, who had played for the first US women's team who won the World Cup, back in 1991. Not all the changes were positive ones: the switch from men's to women's football also meant a different helping of teams, and whereas WLS 2000 had a number of different leagues, here players could only choose between international teams and the US league, making for a total of 50 teams. ■

FACT

Hamm once said in an interview: 'My coach said I ran like a girl. I said if he could run a little faster, he could too.'

MICHAEL OWEN'S WLS 2000

Year 2000
Publisher THQ
Developer Silicon Dreams Studio

WHILE MIA HAMM Soccer 64 was created to capitalise on the huge popularity of women's football in North America, over in Europe the men's game still had a vastly larger audience. As such, Europeans instead got the originally planned title, Michael Owen's WLS 2000 (renamed RTL WLS 2000 in Germany and Telefoot Soccer 2000 in France, because they care more about TV channels and shows than English footballers). Whereas the Mia Hamm game used hand-created animation, the player animations in WLS 2000 are motion-captured, while commentary is handled by Peter Brackley, who was best known at the time for performing commentating duties for Channel 4's *Football Italia* show. There are a total of 10 leagues in the game – English, Scottish, French, Italian, German, Dutch, Spanish, American, Japanese and International – bringing the total number of playable teams to 194. Whereas Michael Owen was clearly in there, real name and all, none of the other player names were real. That's not to say you couldn't tell who they were, mind you, because the game pulled the classic trick of just changing a few letters so you could still figure out who they were supposed to be: for example, Celtic legends Larsson, Lambert, Moravcik and Myallby instead became Larson, Llambirt, Modavchick and Myelby. Although the actual gameplay is quite pedestrian compared to Konami's International Superstar Soccer games, the use of a hi-res graphics mode at least makes it look nice and sharp. ■

FACT

US magazine *Nintendo Power* reviewed a North American version simply named World League Soccer 2000, complete with box art, early in 2000. It would appear it was never released.

MICKEY'S SPEEDWAY USA

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Rare

WHEN YOU THINK of the best karting games on Nintendo 64, the first name that springs to mind is obviously Mario Kart 64, with Diddy Kong Racing usually following close behind. There was a third excellent contender, however, that often goes forgotten: partly because it was released so close to the end of the console's life, and partly because it perhaps was a little more restrained than similar games in the genre at the time. Following its success with Diddy Kong Racing, Rare took on the Disney licence and decided to make another karting game with an adapted version of the DKR engine, this time starring Mickey Mouse and his pals. The story goes that Pluto has been kidnapped by the Weasels because his collar contains a valuable diamond, so Mickey phones his friends and they all head out to rescue him. The thing is, he's been taken to America, meaning Mickey and co find themselves racing in various locations around the US.

There are six characters to choose from at first: Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck, Daisy Duck, Goofy and Pete (why don't the dogs have Dog as their surnames?). This can then be expanded to nine by playing through the game's various cups and unlocking Dewey, Louie and, um… Professor Ludwig von Drake. If you're wondering where Huey is, you'll need the Game Boy Transfer Pak for that. If you have the Game Boy Color version of Mickey's Speedway USA which was released a year earlier, you can bung that into the Transfer Pak and this unlocks Huey in the N64 game, purely as a reward for your dedication to the cause. If you don't have one, don't worry, you aren't missing out: Louie is the best character in the game by a mile.

FACT

Mickey is voiced in the game by Wayne Allwine. He first voiced the character in 1977, and would remain the voice of Mickey for more than three decades until he died in 2009.

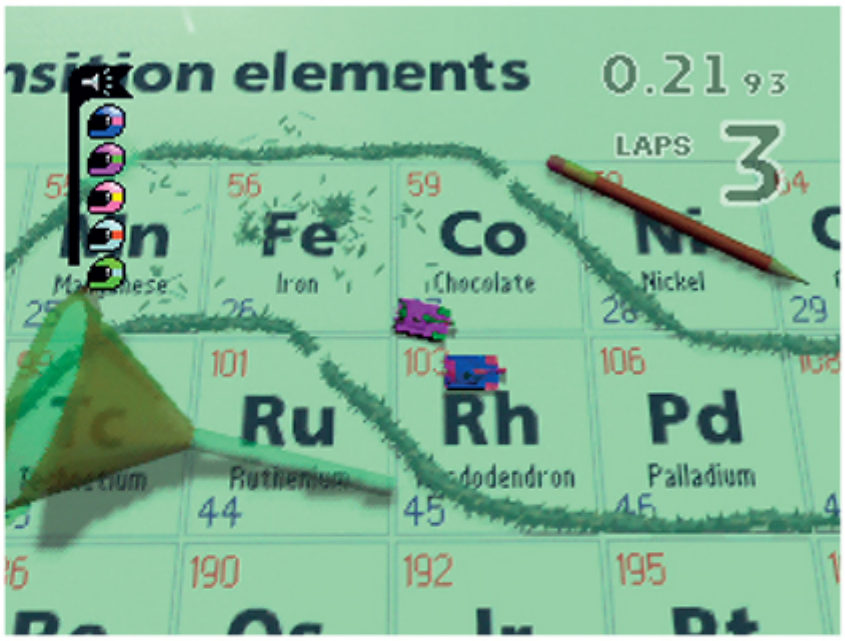
Because of its American setting, the playable tracks on offer are oddly realistic (well, to the extent that a racing game featuring anthropomorphic mice and ducks can be). Instead of wild and wacky environments, players instead find themselves racing through the likes of a dock in Philadelphia, a beach in LA and a sewer in Chicago. This restrained approach extends to the gameplay, too. Although it still features Mario Kart style power ups, they're relatively mild, and while you can perform powerslides they're purely designed to help you get around corners sharper, rather than giving you a special speed booster or anything like that. In a way, then, it does to the karting genre what Mario Golf and Mario Tennis did to their respective sports by resisting the temptation to go crazy and instead offering a surprisingly adept and competent racing game. That said, it does have one moment of madness, in the way its final Cup (series of races) is hidden. Each Cup has a vehicle part hidden in an obscure place on one of its four tracks: you have to find all four parts before the last cup is unlocked. In today's Google era that's no big deal but at the time many kids were left tearing their hair out wondering how to unlock it. ■

MICRO MACHINES 64 TURBO

Year 1999
Publisher Codemasters / Midway
Developer Codemasters

ALTHOUGH CODEMASTERS' MICRO Machines series had a tank-based Mega Drive / Genesis spin-off called Micro Machines Military, it was ultimately decided that it didn't count and that this was the third main game in the series: as such, on other formats including PlayStation and PC, it was known as Micro Machines V3 (which was of course changed for the N64 because some publishers apparently thought it was illegal to not have '64' in the title somewhere). Much like its 8-bit and 16-bit predecessors, Micro Machines 64 Turbo is a top-down racing game where players take control of a variety of Micro Machines, the tiny toy car range created by Galoob (later part of Hasbro) which were like Hot Wheels but even smaller.

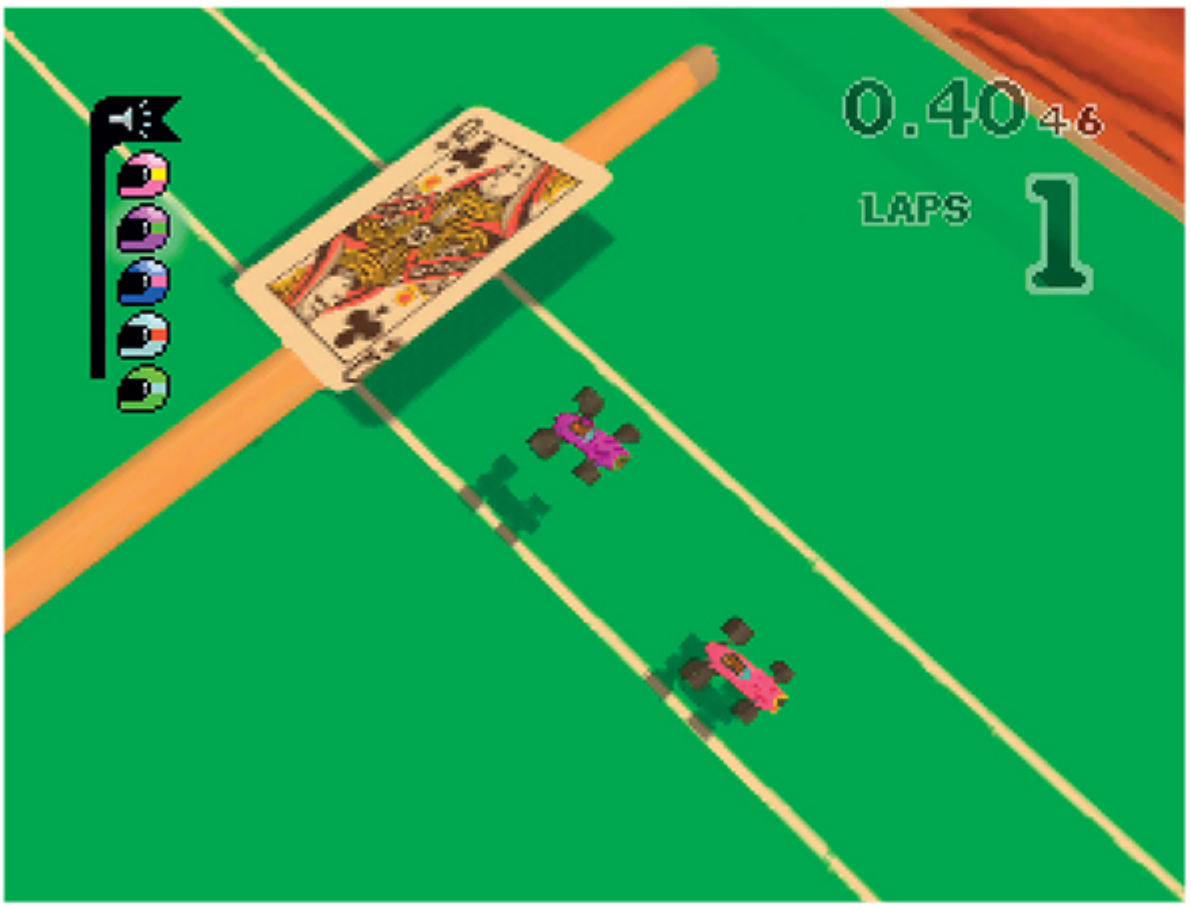
The game plays on the diminutive nature of the cars by setting each track in an oversized real-world location, as if each one had been designed by a very creative child who wanted to race their toy cars on it. There are a total of 48 courses, including the likes of Dunes of Hazard (which takes place on a beach, with a track laid out with seashells), Learning Curves (which is drawn out with chalk on a school desk) and the elaborate Cereal Killer (which starts on the breakfast table, then drops to the kitchen floor before a huge ironing board ramp takes you back up to the table again). Vehicles range from Model T Fords and Ferrari Testarossas (unlicensed, of course) to ice cream vans, hovercraft and monster trucks. Players can also pick up weapons to help them gain an edge, from dynamite and fireballs to mines and even a giant mallet strapped to the front of the car.



FACT

The North American version of the game came with a free Micro Machines car included in the box. Don't bother trying to collect each variation: there are at least a dozen of them, so it seems like they were just chosen at random from a large batch.

Single-player races can be played in two different ways. There's a Challenge mode in which you race against four CPU-controlled opponents in a standard three-lap race like you would expect in any other racing game with full-sized cars. Then there's a head-to-head mode where you take on a single opponent and attempt to score points against them by driving well enough to pull so far ahead of them that they're forced off the edge of the screen. Multiplayer races focus mainly on the latter of these types, with players knocked out as they drop off the edge until there's only one player left: they score a point, everyone returns and the full group goes again.



The Nintendo 64 version was particularly interesting because it offered a ridiculous eight-player mode, and because of the nature of the racing there was no need for split-screen. By making the cars auto-accelerate, players could plug in four controllers and have two people using each one, with one player using left and right on the D-Pad to steer their car, and the other player using the C-Left and C-Right buttons. There weren't many games that boasted an eight-player mode at the time, and because of this anyone who was able to gather together seven friends for a Micro Machines 64 session was guaranteed a highly entertaining time. ■

MIDWAY'S GREATEST ARCADE HITS: VOLUME 1

Year 2000
Publisher Midway Home Entertainment
Developer Digital Eclipse

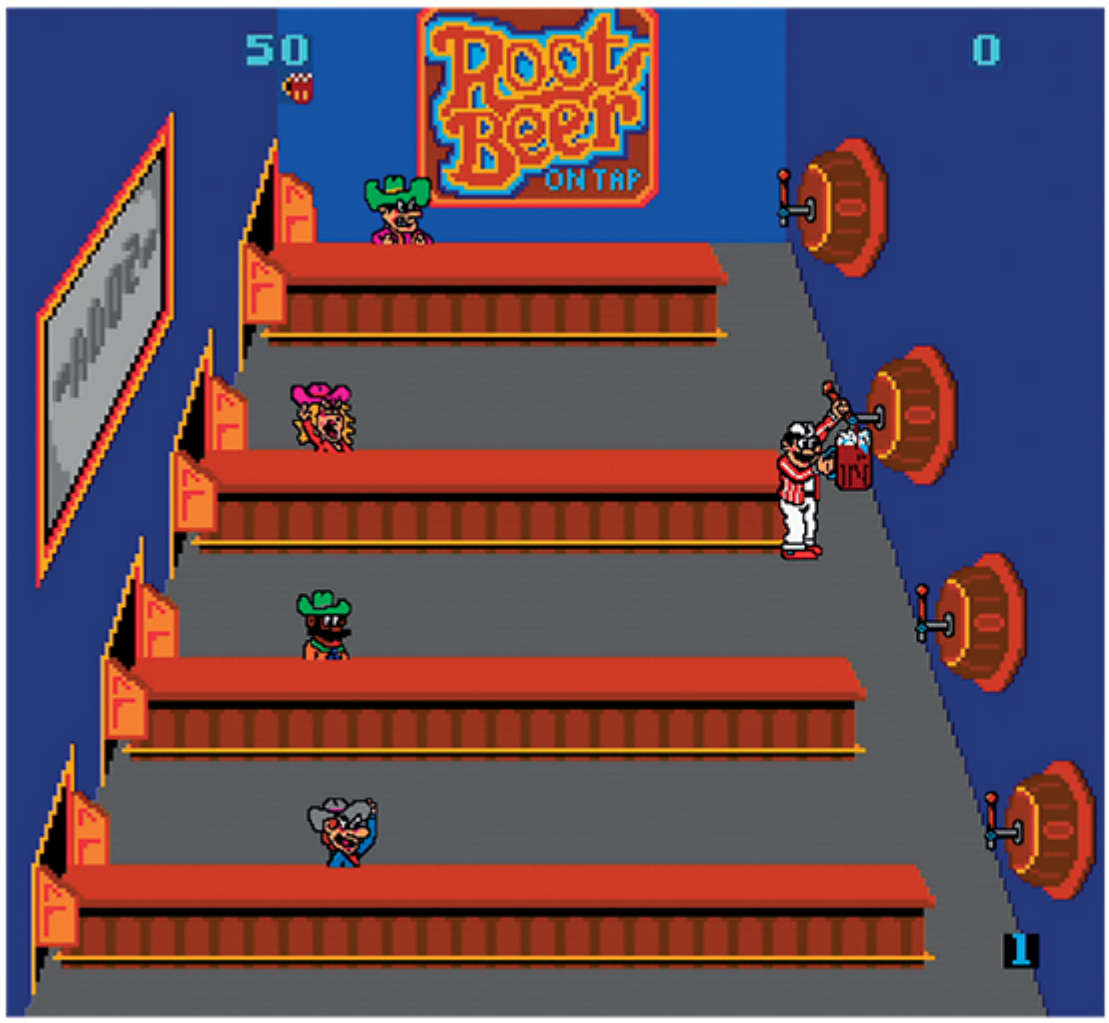
THESE DAYS DIGITAL Eclipse is known for being one of the leading developers of retro compilations. This is mainly thanks to its combination of accurate emulation and copious helpings of behind the scenes content, including digital art books and original design documents, all designed to not only give you the games themselves but also attempt to place them in the context in which they were released. Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits was one of the studio's earliest examples of its retro chops, and one of its first attempts at a retro compilation (though not its very first: see its Atari and Williams collections in the SNES Encyclopedia).

Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits contains six classic arcade games emulated for use on Nintendo 64. The compilation was released on Dreamcast and Game Boy Advance as well, and each version has its own specific list of games. The first of the six on offer here is Defender, Eugene Jarvis's seminal 1981 side-scrolling shoot 'em up in which players have to protect an unnamed planet from waves of invading aliens who are trying to capture the locals. Also included is Sinistar, a top-down shooter which played like a scrolling version of Asteroids and included the titular Sinistar: an enormous spaceship with a skull's face which speaks to the players with lines like 'I hunger, coward' and 'Beware, I live'.

FACT

Despite the title, only Spy Hunter and Root Beer Tapper were originally Midway releases. The other four were released by Williams, which bought Midway in 1988.

The third game in the compilation is Robotron 2084, another Eugene Jarvis classic and one of the earliest examples of the twin stick shooter genre (although because the N64 controller only has one stick, players instead move with the D-Pad and aim with the C buttons). Also included is Joust, a single-screen game where players ride a flying ostrich and try to knock enemy knights off their buzzards. Spy Hunter is also included: this top-down vehicular combat game has players taking on the role of a secret agent similar to James Bond and driving their Interceptor car as far as possible while shooting down enemies. Finally, rounding off the collection is Root Beer Tapper, the non-alcoholic version of Midway's barman simulator, which originally had players serving pints of beer to the customers but was rebranded the following year to remove its Budweiser licensing and make it more suitable for children.



While these days Digital Eclipse's games are packed with extra content, in its earlier days this wasn't quite the case. That's not to say this is an entirely bare-bones offering, mind you. If you reckon you already know your stuff when it comes to all six games, there's also a basic trivia game where players are asked a series of questions about each title. Although the reception to Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits was a little lukewarm at the time – perhaps because the market for 'retro' gaming was still in its infancy and not quite appreciated yet – the game is still a good example of Digital Eclipse's dedication to retro preservation, a mission that thankfully continues in these more enlightened times. ■

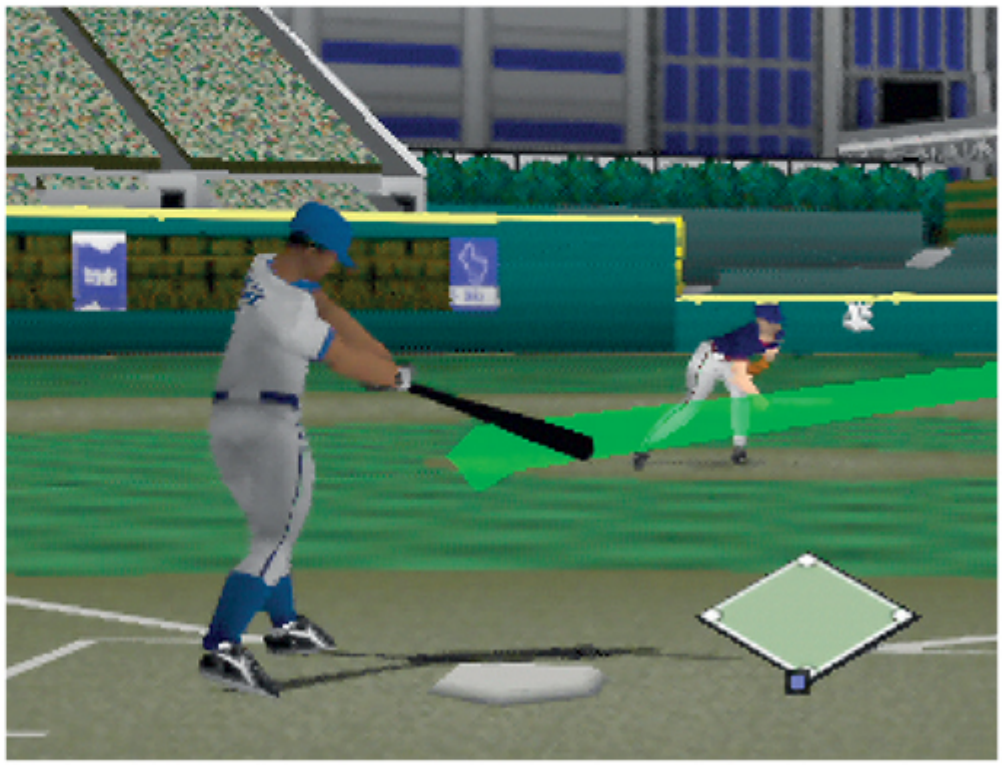
MIKE PIAZZA'S STRIKE ZONE

Year 1998
Publisher GT Interactive
Developer Devil's Thumb Entertainment

PRESUMABLY FEELING LEFT out and looking to get into the sports game scene, GT Interactive came out of the metaphorical bullpen with its own baseball title, emblazoned with the name and likeness of New York Mets catcher Mike Piazza. Like most other baseball games of its era, it featured the full MLB and MLBPA licences, meaning all the team names, logos, uniforms and player names were present and accounted for, as well as polygonal recreations of all 30 MLB ballparks used in the 1997/98 season. On paper it also boasted some interesting features, such as the ability to create your own team and league. It also offered an interesting batting mechanic that allowed players to tell easier whether a pitch was going to land in the strike zone or go outside for a ball. If the trail left by the ball was red it was going to be a strike, if it was blue it was going to be a ball (or headed for Mike Piazza's Ball Zone, if you will). Despite this, the game was generally agreed to be poor, and it's fair to say the press wasn't too kind to it. EGM said 'I still can't believe that a game could play and look this bad on the N64', while IGN was perhaps the most scathing, stating: 'We can't think of one reason, one single advantage that Piazza has over the competition. Unless, of course, it's comedic value you seek in your baseball experience.' ■

FACT

In 2016, Piazza bought Italian football club Reggiana and went on to bankrupt it within two years.



MILO'S ASTRO LANES

Year 1998
Publisher Crave Entertainment
Developer Player 1

IT CAN BE hard to do something unique with bowling games to make them interesting, so fair play to Milo's Astro Lanes for at least trying something different. The game is set in the twenty-second century where Milo S. Terwilliker is a young lad who fancies himself as an expert astro bowler, and so decides to take part in the Astro Games. The sport in question is a cross between mini golf and bowling, though it leans far heavier towards the latter. Each of the game's five alleys has three separate 'Domes', each of which leads you to a different lane difficulty. The Planetary Class Dome is the easiest and the closest to normal bowling, with a straight lane and pins at the end. The Galaxy Class Dome ups the ante by adding jumps, bumps and other obstacles, while the Cosmic Class Dome adds even more hazards to avoid. As well as trying to get your ball down these incredibly busy lanes, you can also collect power ups by rolling your ball over them. These can help you by activating special techniques such as making your ball grow, turning it into three balls or doubling its weight and impact. There are also 'anti specials' you can use to sabotage your opponents, such as placing a bomb on the lane, or dropping acid on it which makes their ball disintegrate. It's still a bowling game when all is said and done, then, but there's enough difference in here to let fans of the sport try something new. ■

FACT

Two of the playable characters are a 'hip alien' called Johnny Slamball and Johnny's girlfriend robot, Ann Droid. 'She's also Milo's love interest, but she doesn't know it,' says the manual, which… hmmm.

MISCHIEF MAKERS

Year	1997
Publisher	Nintendo / Enix
Developer	Treasure

IT'S A LITTLE-KNOWN fact that the phrase 'to shake things up' actually originated as a reference to Mischief Makers. The reason it's little known is probably because it's a complete lie I just made up but hey, it sounded good. It's not an entirely ridiculous notion, however (other than the whole 'not being true' thing), because shaking is the central mechanic behind this interesting action platformer developed by much-loved Tokyo studio Treasure. The game's plot revolves around Marina, a high-powered robot who works as an assistant for an adventurer called Professor Theo. After learning about a crisis on the planet Clancer, the Prof and Marina travel there in their spaceship to see if they can find a way to help. When Marina heads out on a scouting mission to see if the area is safe, the ship is infiltrated by a group of Clancers – the mysterious ghost-faced creatures who live on the planet – who promptly grab the Professor and run off with him. This is particularly odd because the Clancers are renowned for being a peace-loving, kind race, so Marina heads out to not only rescue the Prof but also find out what's going on with these unusually nasty Clancers.

Given that she's a robot, Marina has a special set of skills that no puny human could ever match. For starters, she's armed with a jetpack which provides small bursts of power: this lets her quickly dash to either side, temporarily hover in mid-air (it's more like a double-jump, really) and do a boost forwards

that can be transitioned into a long jump. Her main ability, however, is her tremendous grabbing power. By pressing the B button, you can grab any Clancers or items that appear throughout the stage. Once you've grabbed hold of one, you have a variety of options available to you. You can either simply let go of them to drop them, you can hold a direction and press B again to throw them, you can jump off them to gain extra height or – perhaps most usefully – you can start tapping down on the D-Pad to shake them. Shaking leads to different effects depending on what's being shaken: grab a gun for example and by shaking it you can change the pattern of bullets they fire. Shaking differently coloured Clancers, meanwhile, can make gems appear or even create portals that can send you to other areas (or, indeed, the end of the level).

Despite its inventive gameplay mechanics, Mischief Makers was met with a degree of indifference when it was first released, perhaps because the Nintendo 64's main selling point was polygonal graphics and a 2.5D platformer maybe wasn't the sort of thing players were looking for at the time. As the years have passed, however, more players have started to acknowledge Mischief Makers, less for what it wasn't and more for what it was: a short but creative platformer that's certainly worth a look once you get used to its awkward controls. ■

FACT

The game's Japanese title is Yuke-Yuke!! Trouble Makers (which translates to Go Go Trouble Makers). Given the *Power Rangers* theme song started 'Go go Power Rangers', it's perhaps no surprise it was changed.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

Year	1998
Publisher	Ocean Software / Infogrames
Developer	Ocean Software

WHEN MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE was originally released on the Nintendo 64, the comparisons with GoldenEye 007 were inevitable. After all, not only were both games based on popular spy movies, both were also released a couple of years after the movies they were named after rather than rushed out to coincide with their release. Although the games do share some other similarities – such as the fact that each mission has smaller objectives that must be ticked off in order to clear them in their entirety – their actual gameplay mechanics still differ quite substantially. Whereas GoldenEye is a first-person shooter where players are expected to take out as many enemies as possible (be that stealthily or all guns blazing), Mission: Impossible is instead a third-person action adventure game which runs at a deliberately slower pace.

Here, if you go in guns first you're likely to end up failing your mission in no time at all. Instead, in most of its 20 missions players are encouraged to take their time and quietly analyse the situation while avoiding as much conflict as possible. Although it's essentially based on the hit 1996 movie starring Tom Cruise, the Mission: Impossible game has very little in common with its namesake. It's a completely standalone plot, which opens with a group of terrorists taking over an abandoned Second World War marine base in the fictional area of Ludkwist. The hero, agent Ethan Hunt, has to travel to the base, accompanied by other agents,

with the mission being to sabotage and blow up the base. As they do this, other goings-on elsewhere in the world trigger a series of missions that are so dangerous they could be considered… what's the word? Improbable? Let's go with that. These include doing reconnaissance work at an embassy party (while being sure not to blow your cover or kill any innocent party-goers), escaping from a CIA interrogation unit and meeting with a double-crossing mole at Waterloo Station.

FACT

The game came to the PlayStation a year later with voice acting and FMV cutscenes included.

While GoldenEye focused mainly on gunplay, for the most part weaponry is the last resort here. Instead, the player's main inventory consists of a wide variety of gadgets, which can be used to get Ethan out of various scrapes. The facemaker is the most common one: it allows Ethan to reproduce faces, meaning he can attack an enemy and disguise himself as them so he can freely walk around guarded areas. As the game progresses you'll also make use of the likes of night vision glasses, wire cutters, a fingerprint scanner, nausea powder(!) and a laser deflector prism which lets you get through security laser barriers. Speaking of lasers, yes, naturally the iconic scene from the movie in which Ethan is lowered down on a cord into a laser-filled room is indeed present and accounted for in the game. If this all seems a bit much, there are two difficulty levels, Possible and Impossible. In Possible mode, Ethan can take a lot more damage and his enemies are a few bullets short of a full chamber. ■

MONOPOLY

Year 1999
Publisher Hasbro Interactive
Developer Mind's Eye Productions

IF YOU'VE READ any of my previous encyclopedias you'll already know that there were numerous video game versions of Monopoly released over the years. The Nintendo 64 got one too, and it was one of the first examples that tried to add a bit more character to proceedings than normal. Joining the standard ten tokens at the time – the iron, cannon, top hat, horse, car, wheelbarrow, ship, dog, thimble and boot – is the newly added eleventh token, a sack of money. Each actually animates as it moves across the board, giving more personality to each piece. The game's mascot Mr Monopoly also makes occasional appearances, most regularly to hold any auctions that happen to take place. On paper, Monopoly works about as well as a digital version of the board game could, with an extensive set of options that allow players to essentially create their own set of house rules and an interesting range of AI settings that ditch the usual Easy, Normal, Hard in favour of personalities like Cautious, Bold and Intelligent. The main issue, however, was that the Nintendo 64 version of Monopoly was released in a new era, one where Mario Party exists. Nintendo and Hudson Soft's series showed that video board games could be more than just moving tokens around a board, and could include things like mini-games. As such, Monopoly may have been much-loved as an actual board game but felt more lacking as a video game in a post-Mario Party world. ■

FACT

The thimble, wheelbarrow, boot, horse, iron and sack of money were all retired from the board game in the years that followed. At the time of writing their replacements are a penguin, a T-Rex, a cat and a rubber duck.

MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS 64

Year 1999
Publisher Microsoft / Rockstar Games
Developer Terminal Reality / Edge of Reality

THE MONSTER TRUCK Madness series began life on the PC and enjoyed two popular releases before Microsoft decided to bring it to the Nintendo 64 (with co-publishing assistance from Rockstar Games). Naturally, it's a racing game but with one obvious difference: instead of racing in more conventional cars you're behind the wheel of an enormous monster truck. There are 20 trucks to choose from, all of which are real-life trucks owned and toured by Feld Motorsports, including the likes of Bigfoot, Carolina Crusher and Grave Digger. At the time, Feld was also enjoying a promotional partnership with wrestling promotion WCW, and as a result, a number of their trucks made their way into the game too, including vehicles based on Hollywood Hogan, The Outsiders, Sting and Bret the Hitman Hart. The game's unconventional nature doesn't stop with the type of cars involved: its races are checkpoint-based affairs where you're free to drive wherever you like as long as you make your way through each checkpoint in order. There are also a bunch of multiplayer modes for 1–4 players including Summit Rumble (where you try to stay on top of a big platform with an nWo logo on it without being bumped off), Monster Truck Soccer (a very slow version of Rocket League) and Monster Truck Hockey (the same, but on ice). There's also an odd version of tag where one player is a giant chicken with monster truck wheels and has to tag opponents to turn them into the chicken. ■

FACT

A number of years earlier, WCW had a bizarre 'Sumo Monster Truck' match in which trucks representing Hulk Hogan and The Giant tried to bump each other out of a huge ring. Hogan won, incidentally.

MORTAL KOMBAT 4

Year 1998
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Midway / Eurocom

THIS BOOK HAS already shown multiple examples of platformers that made the jump from the sprite-based games to polygonal 3D during this generation, but that wasn't the only genre that crossed over to the third dimension. Mortal Kombat 4 marked the first polygonal version of Midway's hugely popular fighting game series, and for the most part the results were positive even if the series was starting to lose a little momentum by that point. MK4 retains the same high and low punch and kick buttons that were a staple of the series, as well as the run button and combos that had been introduced in MK3, meaning fans could quickly get to grips with things despite the new look. One new feature, however, was the ability to take out a weapon or pick up other objects lying around each stage. The game was released in arcades first before being ported to home consoles, and the Nintendo 64 version was something of a technical marvel. It was rare for an N64 game to manage a smooth 60 frames per second, but developer Eurocom pulled it off with aplomb here. Naturally, it wouldn't be a Mortal Kombat game without gory moves, and every character has two separate fatalities, some of which are of course exceptionally grim. You've never lived (quite literally) until you've seen series newcomer Quan Chi pulling off his opponent's leg and beating them to death with it. Talk about not being able to foot your medical bill. ■

FACT

Perhaps to make up for his removal from Mortal Kombat Trilogy (see later), the first game's iconic four-armed boss Goro was added to the N64 version of Mortal Kombat 4 as a hidden character.

MORTAL KOMBAT MYTHOLOGIES: SUB-ZERO

Year 1997
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Midway / Avalanche Software

BY THE TIME the first three Mortal Kombat games had been released, fans had become thoroughly invested in the lore and backgrounds of each character in the games. In an attempt to capitalise on this, Midway decided to create a separate spin-off game that would help players learn more about what happened before the first Mortal Kombat tournament was set up. Mythologies follows Sub-Zero in his days as a Lin Kuei assassin and thief, who's been tasked with stealing a map from a Shaolin temple. Turns out there are plenty of people willing to stop him doing it, though. Rather than a one-on-one fighting game, Mortal Kombat Mythologies is a side-scrolling platformer of sorts, where Sub-Zero appears to have just been lifted from the main Mortal Kombat games. He controls similarly too, which is fine when fighting in static arenas but makes for some rather awkward situations when exploring large areas. Players regularly face off against enemies – sometimes more than one at a time – but the addition of the need to manually turn Sub-Zero around with a button makes things quite frustrating. What's worse, the game had a tendency to kill the player with traps that appear out of nowhere, leading to countless cheap deaths. Although the idea of a Mortal Kombat spin-off was an interesting one, the execution (pun always intended) in Mortal Kombat Mythologies was so poorly handled that many critics absolutely savaged the game, especially retrospectively in the years that followed. ■

FACT

The UK's *N64 Magazine* was particularly scathing of Mortal Kombat Mythologies, giving it a score of 9 per cent and saying they would 'sooner be impaled on a spike than play it any more'.

MORTAL KOMBAT TRILOGY

Year 1996
Publisher Williams / GT Interactive
Developer Midway / Williams

WHEN MORTAL KOMBAT 3 was originally released, as much as fans enjoyed it, there was huge outcry at the removal of Scorpion, one of the series' most well-loved characters. Developer Midway tried to make amends for this outrageous oversight by releasing Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3, an enhanced version which included Scorpion and the female ninjas from Mortal Kombat II, and which definitely wasn't the plan all along. 'That's all well and good,' some fans replied, 'but what about the other characters that were also removed?' Deciding to finally draw a line under sprite-based Mortal Kombat games once and for all, Midway released Mortal Kombat Trilogy, a huge title containing every character who had been seen in the three games to that point. Raiden and Baraka made their return from Mortal Kombat II, and previous bosses also turned up to the party again. Old stages were reinstated too, giving players a huge selection of both characters and environments to enjoy. Even previously secret ninja characters like purple ninja Rain, red ninja Ermac and the silhouetted Noob Saibot, were added to the starting roster. It was a Mortal Kombat party and everyone was invited. Well, almost everyone, but I'll get to that.

For the most part, the general gameplay is similar, which is understandable given that it's supposed to be a special edition of the previous titles. However, there's also a new Aggressor bar, which tips its cap to the super meters that featured in other fighting games of the time. As you fight (and especially as you block), the Aggressor bar builds up, and once it's full your character will become faster and perform more powerful moves for a limited time. A new type of finishing move called the Brutality was also added: to pull it off, players had to perform a lengthy 11-hit combo on an opponent with low health. If their health runs out as part of the combo, when you finish inputting the command it will continue into a ridiculously long and fast combination which ends with the opponent exploding into a shower of guts. Look, it's still Mortal Kombat.

FACT

Rain appeared in the opening montage of the arcade version of Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 but wasn't actually in the game. Players spent months trying to find him, but he was eventually included in the home versions.

As definitive as Mortal Kombat Trilogy appeared to be, however, the Nintendo 64 version wasn't quite the complete package due to space restrictions. Two of the most well-loved bosses, the four-limbed Goro and Kintaro, were missing from the game, as was the unmasked version of Sub-Zero (though the masked version performs both masked and unmasked moves to make up for it). Other versions also included special old-school versions of Jax, Kung Lao, Kano and Raiden, who weren't in the N64 game either. Another odd compromise was Chameleon, a ninja who randomly switches between all the different coloured male ninjas as he fights, adopting their moves on the fly. He isn't in the N64 game, but he's replaced with Khameleon, who's basically the female equivalent and switches between Kitana, Mileena and Jade instead. ■

MS PAC-MAN MAZE MADNESS

Year 2000
Publisher Namco
Developer Mass Media Games

DID YOU KNOW that Pac-Land has four 'Gems of Virtue': Generosity, Truth, Wisdom and Courage? Did you know these gems are located in the four Wonders of Pac-Land, mystical regions separated from the rest of the world by forcefields? And did you also know that someone has invaded the Enchanted Castle in Pac-Land and turned it into a ghost house? And that they're planning to attack the Wonders and steal the gems to make darkness and chaos fall on Pac-Land? And finally, did you know that this is all an intensely elaborate plot designed to give purpose to the age-old Pac-Man process of eating dots and ghosts?

FACT

Ms Pac-Man was originally going to be called Miss Pac-Man, until someone at Midway pointed out that in the game's third cut-scene she and Pac-Man have a baby, so they changed the name to avoid some people criticising her for giving birth out of wedlock.

Well, that's exactly what's going on in Ms Pac-Man Maze Madness, a perfectly entertaining maze game that doesn't really require a hokey plot, but there you go. The game is basically what you'd expect from a Pac-Man game that has evolved to match the graphics of the era. At its core it's still about running around mazes as Ms Pac-Man and eating dots, but naturally the mazes are now polygonal structures with height to them. There's also a lot more to them than simply eating everything: there are now puzzles to solve with all manner of switches, jumps, and gates, and a wider variety of enemies (though eating a Power Pellet still enables you to eat the majority of them). If all this is a bit too elaborate for you, there's also a Classic mode which gives players a faithful rendition of the original Ms Pac-Man. ■

MULTI RACING CHAMPIONSHIP

Year 1997
Publisher Ocean Software / Imagineer
Developer Genki

AS ONE OF the earliest racing games on the Nintendo 64, Multi Racing Championship (or MRC as the cool kids called it) certainly has its limitations, but that's not to say it didn't do some things well. Players can choose between eight cars, split into two categories: 4WD off-roaders and RWD stock cars. Each car can also have their tyres, brakes, suspension, steering, gears and aerodynamics tuned, giving players more control over how they handle. It's necessary, too: the game's circuits are a mixture of asphalt and dirt racing, meaning copious helpings of Ridge Racer type powerslides are the order of the day. That isn't the only way in which the game is similar to Ridge Racer: players can eventually unlock special one-on-one races with MRC's equivalent to 'devil' and 'angel' cars, named Hannya and Deus, and beating them will unlock them for use. Sadly, not all the similarities are positive ones: much like Namco's game and other early era polygonal arcade racers the number of tracks is disappointingly low. There are only three to choose from – Sea Side, Mountain and Downtown – as well as unlockable mirror versions of them. The result is a game that received its fair share of praise for its healthy selection of cars and flexible tuning system, but was also criticised for its lack of longevity due to the limited number of circuits available to race on. ■

FACT

Genki was best known for racing games in general, and was responsible for the Tokyo Highway Challenge / Tokyo Xtreme Racer series.

MYSTICAL NINJA STARRING GOEMON

Year	1997
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEO

LOOK UP THE phrase 'cult favourite' in the dictionary and you'll see a picture of Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon. I mean, you won't really, given that dictionaries don't have pictures in them, but you get what I'm trying to say. Mystical Ninja is one of those games that hasn't been played by an enormous number of people, but those who do experience it tend to fall in love with it and list it as one of their favourite games on the system.

The game is set in Oedo Town, where a giant UFO shaped like a peach has suddenly appeared. Inside it are the Peach Mountain Shoguns, a group of rather dramatic and flamboyant villains who don't have your conventional plans of taking over the world, but instead want to turn the whole of Japan into an enormous stage so they can perform on it. This may sound harmless enough, if a little inconvenient for the people of Japan, but the Peach Mountain Shoguns take things a little too far when they start kidnapping any children who appear to have dancing talent. It's up to Goemon and his three friends Ebisumaru, Sasuke and Yae to make their way across Japan and defeat the Peach Mountain Shoguns, lowering the curtain on their bizarrely theatrical plans.

The most boring yet accurate way to describe Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon would be to simply call it a 3D adventure game which feels like a cross between Ocarina of Time and Super Mario 64. While its use of large open areas which join smaller locations together gives its exploration a similar feel to that of Zelda, the actual gameplay has more in common with Super Mario 64, with Goemon able to quickly run, jump and attack enemies, collecting coins from them as he defeats them. I appreciate that none of this sounds dramatically original at this stage but it's not Mystical Ninja's mechanics that make it such a notable and well loved Nintendo 64, but its eccentricity.

FACT

An anime series based on Goemon was released in 1997 and lasted for 23 episodes. It got an English dub called *Legend of the Mystical Ninja*.

Put simply, the game is absolutely bonkers and is filled to the brim with a surrealist Japanese sense of humour. When an anime-style intro sequence complete with its own dramatically sung theme music is the most normal part of the game you know you're in for a crazy time, with all manner of strange plot points and other odd moments such as terrible puns accompanied by canned laughter, strange anachronisms (like airplanes in a game set in feudal Japan) and one of the most bizarre Game Over screens you'll ever see, in which two giant ogres in tiny swimming trunks do a hula-hoop underneath a disco ball.

Of course, none of this would be of much use if Mystical Ninja wasn't actually entertaining to play, but the game itself is an enjoyable adventure which performs solidly, looks colourful and contains a decent amount of variety in its gameplay due to the different skills provided by each of its four protagonists. ■

MYSTICAL NINJA 2 STARRING GOEMON

Year	1998
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEO

WHILE THE FIRST Mystical Ninja game on the Nintendo 64 has something of a strong cult following, its sequel (known as Goemon's Great Adventure in North America) perhaps isn't quite so well-known. It deserves recognition all the same, though. The game starts with Goemon and his friend Ebisumaru visiting their mutual chum the Wise Old Man. He's come up with a new invention called the Super Gorgeous Ghost Machine, and he plans on using it to bring dead celebrities back to life (good news, Charles de Gaulle fans). Unfortunately, before he can use it, his descendant Bisumaru – who had previously travelled back to Goemon's time from the future and gotten stuck, but that was a whole other thing – has captured the machine and plans to use it to revive and marry Dochuki, the master of the underworld. It's up to Goemon and Ebisumau to chase after Bisumaru, get the machine back and prevent Dochuki from being resurrected (although obviously you know that's going to happen).

Although its predecessor ditched the series' conventional 2D gameplay in favour of 3D open-world adventuring, the sequel brings things back to two dimensions for the majority of the time. That said, it's actually a 2.5D platformer: while it's firmly locked to a single plane for the most part, the polygonal visuals allows for fancy camera swoops to add a little visual pizzaz to proceedings and add a feeling of depth. Players can initially choose between Goemon and Ebisumaru, but at the end of the first stage they then recruit Sasuke, their ninja chum who can throw projectiles as standard. Players can switch between the characters at various points and can also find a fourth partner, Yae, later in the game.

FACT

At the time of writing, Goemon hasn't starred in a new game since a Japan-only DS title back in 2005. Since then, he's only appeared on a couple of Japanese slot machines.

Although the main meat of the game is its 2.5D side-scrolling platformer stages, there are also moments where players can visit towns and explore their various buildings in three dimensions, talking to the villagers who live there. This is essential for progression because as you unlock new worlds, you also need to have a certain number of entry passes before you can gain access to them, and many of these passes are earned by carrying out quests for the various townsfolk you encounter. The game also has a day and night cycle similar to Ocarina of Time, with the music changing accordingly. Night time is more dangerous because the enemies become faster and more powerful, but some quests only appear at night.

Mystical Ninja 2 Starring Goemon continues to enjoy the bizarre sense of humour that its predecessor had in spades, and while it may not be quite as outlandish as the first game it's still full of chuckles. It should appeal more to fans of more straightforward 2D platformers, though it's worth noting that it starts off fairly tricky. Oh, and every now and then you take part in a giant robot battle, because why not. ■

NAGANO WINTER OLYMPICS 98

Year	1997
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEO

AFTER RELEASING SEVEN games in a row based on the summer Olympic Games (mostly under its Track & Field brand), Konami finally decided to jump over to its chillier equivalent with an officially licensed Winter Olympics game based on the Nagano games of 1998. There are 10 events to choose from: alpine skiing downhill, alpine skiing giant slalom, snowboard giant slalom, snowboard half pipe, speed skating, bobsleigh, luge, ski jumping freestyle, skiing aerials and curling. Each discipline has its own unique controls and, as with most games of this type, some are more appealing than others depending on personal taste. Slalom events, for example, are the easiest to initially get to grips with thanks to their controls, which make them feel similar to a racing game. There are 16 countries to choose from, and players can also add their own name to give things that personal touch. They can then choose between either Olympic mode (where you choose a single event and try to beat your record) or Championship mode, where you take part in seven events and try to get a medal based on your total score for all events. The latter is almost like a decathlon but with seven events instead (so a septathlon, I suppose). Although you wouldn't necessarily know it was part of the Track & Field series, the game was known as Hyper Olympics in Nagano in Japan, making the connection clearer (because Track & Field is often known as Hyper Olympics in that region). ■

FACT

Germany finished atop the real-life Nagao Games' medal table with 29 medals, 12 of which were gold. Great Britain won a single bronze medal for the bobsleigh, and even that was shared with France, who got exactly the same time.

NAMCO MUSEUM 64

Year	1999
Publisher	Namco
Developer	Namco

NAMCO WAS ONE of the most iconic developers of arcade games, starting in the late '70s and enjoying huge success throughout the '80s and '90s. In the mid '90s Namco started taking its legacy seriously, and started re-releasing some of its classic arcade games (a practice it continues to this day under its new name Bandai Namco). Its first venture was the Namco Museum series, which consisted of six separate volumes released on the PlayStation between 1995 and 1998. When the Nintendo 64 was released, Namco released a Museum compilation for it as well, consisting of six classic Namco arcade games. The first two were Pac-Man and Ms Pac-Man, ensuring that fans of blob-munching hedonism were more than adequately catered for. Accompanying these were Galaxian and Galaga, Namco's much-loved vintage arcade shoot 'em ups which took the Space Invaders formula and improved it with swooping enemies and other secrets. Also in the N64 collection are Dig-Dug (everyone's favourite underground enemy-inflating game) and Pole Position, one of the most influential racing games ever released. Although the emulation for each game was well handled and the results were accurate portrayals of the arcade originals, Namco Museum 64 was still considered slightly underwhelming because it didn't include a virtual museum which could be browsed in first person, like all the PlayStation entries before it did. Still, while the overall package could be questioned, the importance and timelessness of the six games included can't. ■

FACT

Pole Position was the highest-grossing arcade game in North America in 1983 and 1984, and even ended up with its own Saturday morning animated series.

NASCAR 99

Year 1998
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Sports / Stormfront Studios

AFTER RELEASING ITS first NASCAR game, NASCAR 98, on the PlayStation and Saturn, EA brought the series to the Nintendo 64 for its second outing. NASCAR 99 boasts a bunch of officially licensed NASCAR drivers and their cars, including 31 racers from the 1998 Winston Cup Series season and six NASCAR legends including Benny Parsons and Richard Petty (though the best racer in the game is Dick Trickle, based on his name alone). There are 17 licensed tracks in the game too, from Indianapolis to Talladega, but while cynical types would be right to point out that most of them are just ovals, there are still some road tracks in there with more varied turns, like Sears Point and Watkins Glen. ■

FACT

Dick Trickle broke his hip at the age of eight and was told he'd likely never walk again, but eventually became a NASCAR racer despite this. So that'll teach you to laugh at his name.

NASCAR 2000

Year 1999
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Sports / Stormfront Studios

EA RETURNED THE following year with its next NASCAR title, which was very much an upgrade of NASCAR 99 rather than a complete overhaul. This time the game was based on the 1999 Winston Cup Series (which was won in real life by Dale Jarrett) and the number of tracks increased to 18, with the Homestead-Miami Speedway added to the list. It's an oval too, which is great news because NASCAR games really need more of those. The roster also increased to 40 racers, with the likes of Dale Earnhardt Jr and Tony Stewart joining the game, but it was sadly time to say farewell to Dick Trickle, who didn't feature in the game. Which technically makes NASCAR 99 the better game by default. ■

FACT

NASCAR loves its racers sharing their father's names. Included in the NASCAR 2000 roster are Dale Earnhardt Jr and Sr, Kenny Irwin Jr and Wally Dallenbach, son of Wally Dallenbach Sr.

NBA COURTSIDE 2: FEATURING KOBE BRYANT

Year 1999
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Left Field Productions

IT TURNED OUT that backing young Kobe Bryant was a gamble that paid off, because (spoilers) he actually ended up being quite good at basketball. Following the success of both Kobe Bryant in NBA Courtside and Bryant himself on the court, then, Nintendo decided to publish a follow-up based on the 1999–2000 NBA season. This time Kobe provided the motion capture for the game himself, meaning all his signature moves were present and accounted for. The game also included a new create-a-rookie mode where players could sculpt their own future star and watch as their stats increased or decreased depending on how well they played each game. Most of the other additions were fairly straightforward, though: a new three-point contest mode was included, and players could now play through multiple seasons instead of just one. Like its predecessor, NBA Courtside 2 features some strange cheat codes that make things a little more surreal than usual. As well as some of the cheats you'd expect like big heads or small players, there were also some more surreal codes including the ability to unlock clone teams, where every player in the roster is the same person. I'm not just talking basketball stars here, either: it was possible to fill a team with, for example, Nintendo's other licenced sports star, baseball player Ken Griffey Jr. Or, if you ever fancied playing as a team full of clones of Nintendo of America president Minorou Arakawa, you were in luck. ■

FACT

The second game was a particularly good time to back Kobe: the Lakers would go on to win the NBA Finals that season, then do so again the following two seasons.

NBA HANGTIME

Year 1997
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Midway Games

FOR A NUMBER of years, Midway and Acclaim were best of friends. Midway would make great arcade games, and Acclaim would make home ports of them. Eventually, the two companies split up in the mid '90s, but through some allegedly dubious negotiating with the NBA, Acclaim ended up claiming ownership of the NBA Jam licence that Midway had made so popular in the arcades. Stunned, Midway eventually decided the name wasn't the game, so it negotiated a separate deal with the NBA to make a new title, NBA Hangtime, then published the home version itself (with GT Interactive helping out in Europe). Title aside, NBA Hangtime is clearly the spiritual successor to NBA Jam: it retained almost the entire development team and it kept most of the game's key elements including two-on-two basketball, over the top dunks and the 'on fire' mechanic when the player scores three times in a row. It does add some new features, though, in order to make sure it was an evolution and not just an NBA Jam clone: the likes of alley-oop moves and outdoor courts gave things extra variety, and you can also create your own player for the first time in the series (well, the 'series' in quote marks), with a selection of odd faces like aliens and chicken heads. Although NBA Hangtime didn't enjoy anywhere near the same level of success as NBA Jam did, it was still classic NBA Jam in every sense. As for Acclaim's new NBA Jam games? Well, we'll get to that. ■

FACT

The fantastic book *NBA Jam* by Reyan Ali gives a lot more detail on the conflict between Midway and Acclaim and what happened with the licensing.

NBA IN THE ZONE 98

Year 1998
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

KONAMI HAD ALREADY dabbled with basketball games for a number of years by this point. Having released Double Dribble in the arcades in the mid '80s and its subsequent (extremely popular) NES port, it followed this up with Double Dribble: The Playoff Edition on the Mega Drive and NBA Give 'n Go on the SNES. When it made the jump to polygons it initially focused solely on the PlayStation, with NBA in the Zone and NBA in the Zone 2. It wasn't until the third game that Konami not only switched to a yearly naming system, but also brought the series to the Nintendo 64 for the first time. NBA in the Zone 98 naturally includes the full NBA licence, meaning all real team names, logos and players are featured in full, and players were able to take on the full 1997–98 NBA season should they so desire. The game boasted 300 motion-captured animations, the ability to create your own player and trade them into any team you want, and actual announcements by real-life NBA arena announcer Ray Clay. Although it included almost every NBA star – Shaq, Scottie Pippen, Patrick Ewing, even the often missing Charles Barkley – Michael Jordan isn't in there, as he wasn't in most basketball games of the era, so instead players had to play as the generic Roster Guard, playing with a number 80 shirt. Apparently when the game's box says 'when you're in the zone, no one can stop you', it's not referring to likeness rights. ■

FACT

Ray Clay was the Chicago Bulls announcer from 1990. When Jordan and the Washington Wizards came to play in 2002, Clay complained that he wasn't allowed to introduce him like he did when he was at the Bulls. He was let go shortly afterwards.

NBA IN THE ZONE 99

Year 1999
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

NBA IN THE Zone 98 did well enough to justify keeping the series on the Nintendo 64, but the differences made for the 1999 version were minimal. The game's graphics were made a little sharper, which was a welcome addition (some critics claimed that 98 was a bit on the blurry side), and the introduction of more motion-captured animations made things look a little more realistic (relatively speaking). The actual gameplay itself didn't see too many changes, but those looking for a fun diversion could try out the new three-point shootout more where you could pick a player and try to score as many three-pointers as possible before a timer runs out. Nothing ground-breaking (some other games offered similar) but an improvement nonetheless. ■

FACT

Glen Rice appears on the cover wearing an LA Lakers uniform (because he'd just moved there), but he's still playing for the Charlotte Hornets in the game because its rosters are out of date.

NBA IN THE ZONE 2000

Year 2000
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

CRITICAL REACTION TO the NBA in the Zone series was consistently underwhelming, so the 2000 edition was to be the fifth and final entry. Somewhat predictably, changes were even more minimal compared to those made in the 1999 version, with some new dunking animations added to mix things up a bit, and a revised free throw meter. Other than that, the whole thing's very similar, three-point shootout mode and all. Critics continued to be harsh on it too: *Next Generation* magazine said: 'If we followed the credo of "if you don't have anything nice to say then don't say anything at all", this review would already be over.' And with that, In the Zone went into retirement as Konami switched its focus to the next generation. ■

FACT

Konami didn't spend too long licking its wounds. Just nine months later it jumped to next-gen, releasing ESPN NBA 2Night on the PS2 and Dreamcast.

NBA JAM 99

Year 1998
Publisher Acclaim Sports
Developer Iguana West

AS EXPLAINED IN the NBA Hangtime entry, while Midway developed the NBA Jam series it was Acclaim that ended up with the licence following their split. This left the latter with a dilemma: how to make a new NBA Jam game without any of the NBA Jam development team involved? Well, the biggest move was to ditch the two-on-two basketball action that made the series so popular in the first place, replacing it with more conventional five-on-five gameplay with all the rules and regulations NBA Jam was previously famous for ignoring. There is a separate Jam mode, however, which does at least turn off most fouls, adds the 'on fire' feature and makes the dunks more over-the-top but it's never quite as crazy as its Midway-developed predecessors. ■

FACT

This was actually Acclaim's second attempt at a new NBA Jam. Its first, NBA Jam Extreme, was a polygonal take on two-on-two and did okay in arcades but its home versions on PlayStation and Saturn were poorly received.

NBA JAM 2000

Year 1999
Publisher Acclaim Sports
Developer Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City

RESPONDING TO THE most common criticism of NBA Jam 99 – that it wasn't really NBA JAM in anything but name – Acclaim decided to offer players the best of both worlds. Its standard mode retained the usual 5 vs 5 format that was used in NBA Jam 99, but for the Jam mode Acclaim decided to opt back to the classic 2 vs 2 action the series was best known for when it was under Midway's ownership. It still wasn't perfect – the Jam mode could only be used for one-off exhibition games – but it certainly played more like the NBA Jam fans knew and loved. Most importantly, the game's underlying basketball gameplay was solid enough that critics praised both 99 and 2000 regardless. ■

FACT

Acclaim continued with NBA Jam 2001 and 2002 on the Game Boy Color, before having one more shot in 2003 with a three-on-three PS2 and Xbox game simply called NBA Jam.

NBA LIVE 99

Year 1998
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Canada / NuFX

THE NBA LIVE series had been enjoying life on the PlayStation since its 1996 entry, and finally came to the N64 in time for its fifth instalment. In reality though, it was more like the fourth instalment, as the N64 version was technically actually a port of NBA Live 98, which wasn't a huge deal (since 98 wasn't on the N64) but did mean it was missing 'new' features like facial animations. Despite EA's commitment to realism there's an option to include 'monster dunks' and 'arcade SFX' – the former is a fun way to give a very slight NBA Jam feel to proceedings by increasing the height players jump when performing dunks, while the latter replaces the normal sound effects with a cringeworthy series of boinks and splats. ■

FACT

The NBA suffered a lockout for six months, messing up the game's roster. EA got around this by releasing an updated roster after launch for any players with a Dexdrive, a device that let them transfer save files to an N64 Memory Pak.

NBA LIVE 2000

Year 1999
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Canada / NuFX

FOR ITS SECOND (and final) N64 entry in the NBA Live series, EA enhanced its arcade mode by adding a wider selection of big 'monster' dunks. Annoyingly, though, they were tied to the 'wacky' sound effects this time, meaning you couldn't have one without the other. The big addition, however, was something – or, rather, someone – that every NBA game was struggling to get the rights to at that point, a certain Mr Michael Jordan. Although His Airness couldn't be used in normal games at first, players were able to take him on in a one-on-one street match, and if they beat him he would be added to the game's free agent list, meaning he could be traded into whatever team you liked. ■

FACT

Jordan also appeared in EA's NBA Street and NBA Street Vol 2, but these would mark his last video game appearances for more than a decade, until 2K Games paid up the big bucks and included him as a legend in NBA 2K11.

NBA SHOWTIME: NBA ON NBC

Year 1999
Publisher Midway
Developer Midway Games / Eurocom

WHILE ACCLAIM CONTINUED to release more games with the NBA Jam name attached to them, Midway stuck to its guns and continued to release spiritual successors to the series that was once its own. NBA Showtime is the follow-up to NBA Hangtime and once again features typical two-on-two basketball action similar to that seen in the NBA Jam series. The main difference here is that NBA Showtime is the first game (in Midway's series, at least) to ditch the sprite-based graphics and go for a polygonal look instead. Despite the change in appearance, the game still plays just like its predecessors, with extremely fast-paced two-on-two gameplay and over-the-top dunks (as well as that classic 'on fire' game mechanic, of course). One addition to NBA Showtime that makes it clear that this is a spiritual successor to NBA Jam is the return of Tim Kitzrow, the original NBA Jam announcer, as the commentator this time around (having been missing from NBA Hangtime). This ensures that while the game's new polygonal look means it no longer looks exactly like NBA Jam, Kitzrow's commentary meant it certainly sounded like it. In typical NBA Jam fashion, there are also a host of unlockable characters including a bunch of NBA mascots (all hail the Toronto Raptor). Although this wasn't to be Midway's last basketball game, it was to be the last time it would offer two-on-two gameplay in the traditional NBA Jam style, and it's fair to say it went out on a high. ■

FACT

As the name suggests, the game had a sponsorship with TV channel NBC to promote its NBA coverage. All this really meant, though, was the NBC logo appearing in a bunch of places.

THE NEW TETRIS

Year 1999
Publisher Nintendo
Developer H20 Entertainment

AFTER IMPRESSING NINTENDO with Tetrisphere (seen elsewhere in this book), Canadian studio H2O Entertainment was given the reins to make a more conventional Tetris game. The result was The New Tetris, a generally easier take on the series that never really reaches extremely high speeds. One unique feature it offers is the ability to make giant gold and silver squares out of the smaller pieces: if you can somehow make a four-by-four square using four separate tetrominoes without a bit sticking out, it'll turn into a solid block and you'll get far more points for clearing it. It was also one of the first Tetris games that introduced the Hold feature, where players could hold a piece they didn't like and swap it out for another. Although the game itself is perfectly functional, The New Tetris would ultimately become notorious for something most players knew nothing about. Right before the final code was submitted, lead programmer David Pridie slipped in a massive text rant, assuming nobody would see it for a long time. Instead, the game was hacked within about three days and Pridie's rant – which called out other members of staff for being lazy, said 'this game sucks' and listed Nintendo as one of 56 of his most hated things in the world – was spread online, leading to an awkward conversation between Nintendo and H20 bosses. Sadly, Pridie passed away a couple of years later at the age of 29 following a bronchial asthma attack. ■

FACT

Pridie's entire 2000+ word rant can be found online if you search for TetrisRant. Just a heads up, the language can get a tad colourful at times.

NFL BLITZ

Year 1998
Publisher Midway
Developer Midway Games

WITH NBA JAM proving to be a roaring success, Midway decided to apply the formula to other American sports. NFL Blitz, for example, was essentially NBA Jam if it was American football and the results, while similarly madcap, were still enjoyable in their own unique way. As in NBA Jam, most of the rules in the real sport were overlooked here in favour of fast-paced, over-the-top action. For starters, it takes a leaf out of Jam's book by reducing the number of players on the field (there are only seven on each team instead of 11). Meanwhile, other incidents that would be flagged by a referee in the real sport are turned a blind eye to here, such as pass interference and excessive celebrations. You can even smash into opponents after a play ends, something that would be considered unnecessary roughness in real life (hell, you can even do a leg drop on them if you want). Quarterbacks were able to throw the ball the entire length of the field if needed – with the game changing the number of yards needed per first down to 30 instead of 10 to make up for it – while defensive players could pull off tackles that verged on wrestling territory, like suplexes. Although the NFL Blitz series didn't reach quite the same level of outright hysteria as NBA Jam did in either arcades or its subsequent home versions, it was still loved enough to spawn plenty of sequels, as you're about to see. ■

FACT

As with the NBA Jam games, NFL Blitz included a bunch of secret characters, including Raiden from Mortal Kombat (as shown in the screenshot).

NFL BLITZ 2000

Year 1999
Publisher Midway
Developer Midway Games

NFL BLITZ GOT an arcade sequel, NFL Blitz 99. This 2000 edition is actually a home port of that, and includes an expanded playbook with the ability to customise plays and call audibles before the snap. Four-player support was added for the first time on N64 and new stadiums, like a Greek palace, were included too. A new 'on fire' mode similar to NBA Jam improves your offence if a receiver catches three passes in a row, or your defence if you sack the QB twice in a row. It wasn't all good news: the N64 version included a new passing system where, instead of pressing buttons that corresponded to receivers, they chose a direction to throw instead, leading to issues whenever receiver runs crossed over. ■

FACT

At some point in 1999 Midway created a special dual-screen arcade cabinet called the SportStation, which included both NFL Blitz 2000 and NBA Showtime in one setup.

NFL BLITZ 2001

Year 2000
Publisher Midway
Developer Point of View

FOR THE MOST part, NFL Blitz 2001's upgrades are more subtle than before. The AI has been improved to make things easier for beginners and harder for experts, while the graphics have been slightly tweaked with more animations and player celebrations. The most notable new feature is a new option called Party Games, which includes three mini games. First and Goal Frenzy has you trying to score a touchdown over 10 yards, then 20, then 30 and so on, while Goal Line Stand does the opposite: you have to defend a touchdown from 50 yards out, then 40, 30 etc. Finally, QB Challenge is a passing mini-game where players have to successfully pass the ball to three different receivers before the timer runs out. ■

FACT

A TV ad for the first Blitz showed Steelers QB Kordell Stewart doing target practice by throwing balls at marching band members. The National Association of Music Educators made a formal complaint.

NFL BLITZ SPECIAL EDITION

Year 2001
Publisher Midway
Developer Point of View

THE NINTENDO 64 was all but dead by the end of 2001, but there was still a bit of a market for players who owned the console and liked renting games. With that in mind, Midway released NFL Blitz Special Edition, which is essentially an updated version of NFL Blitz 2001 that was exclusive to Blockbuster Video stores in North America. The game is identical to the 2001 entry in almost every way, with the only exception being that the rosters were updated in line with the 2001–02 NFL season. Although it was initially a rental-only title, Blockbuster changed its mind after a week or two and started selling it for full-price in its stores too, so boxed copies aren't as hard to find as other rental exclusives. ■

FACT

The original Blitz was supposed to be noticeably more violent and even bloody, until the NFL saw it and demanded it be toned down. One NFL rep reportedly asked Midway: 'Are you guys out of your f***ing minds?'

NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB 98

Year 1997
Publisher Acclaim Sports
Developer Iguana Entertainment

THIS WAS THE fourth game in the NFL Quarterback Club series, which had started life on 16-bit consoles. Acclaim had acquired the exclusive NFL licence for N64 games for the 1997–98 season (forcing EA to drop it for Madden 64), meaning it stood alone as the first game on the console to offer all 30 real NFL team names and uniforms. It was also the first Nintendo 64 game to run in high-resolution mode, offering a 648x480 resolution. It even employed the Green Bay Packers' MVP quarterback Brett Favre to design some of the game's plays. Rounding things off was a Simulation mode, which presented players with 50 classic moments from historical games and gave them the change to rewrite history. ■

FACT

The game's commentator Marv Albert pled guilty to assault and battery of his lover just one month before the game was released. Awkwardly for Acclaim, the game was already in production and it was too late to remove him.

NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB 99

Year 1998
Publisher Acclaim Sports
Developer Iguana Entertainment

WITH EA RECOVERING its NFL licence in time for Madden NFL 99, Acclaim would have to rely on more than just its official branding to continue to compete. Naturally, all 31 teams (including the returning Cleveland Browns) were still present and accounted for here, while Acclaim brought in New York Jets' offensive coordinator to help the development team improve the opponent AI. Around 250 new animations were added to the game, the playbooks were updated to better match those of the real-life teams, and the Simulation mode was updated to provide some more purpose: this time, instead of just playing through 50 indiscriminate games from history, players were reliving all 32 Super Bowls that had been played to that point. ■

FACT

Unsurprisingly, Marv Albert was ditched from commentating duties for the '99 edition. Replacing him was ESPN's Mike Patrick and CBS's Randy Cross.

NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB 2000

Year 1999
Publisher Acclaim Sports
Developer Acclaim Studios Austin

THE '98 AND '99 editions of NFL Quarterback Club were exclusive to the Nintendo 64, but for the 2000 version Acclaim decided to bring the series to the Dreamcast as well. This may have led to the company focusing more of its efforts on Sega's shiny new system, because critics generally agreed that the N64 version of 2000 was lacking, even compared to its predecessors. While player faces had been improved (showing such details as eye black and breathe strips), most of the other 'key' features being promoted on the box – the improved AI, the Simulation mode, even the Browns' return – had debuted the previous year. The biggest issue, though, was the frame rate, which now dropped to around 15 fps at times. ■

FACT

The last game in the series, NFL QB Club 2002, was the only one to be released on the PS2 and GameCube. A couple of years later, as Acclaim was going bankrupt, EA signed an exclusivity deal with the NFL.

NFL QB CLUB 2001

Year 2000
Publisher Acclaim Sports
Developer High Voltage Software

NO PRIZES FOR guessing what the priority was for Acclaim when it came to the fourth and final entry for Quarterback Club (sorry, I mean QB Club) on the Nintendo 64: that lousy frame rate. Sure enough, the 2001 edition ran significantly smoother, with the box also proudly boasting that it had 'game speed maximised for the N64'. Other than that, most of the other changes were minimal, save for a new shoulder charge technique (making it easier for players to plough through defenders), and improvements made to the passing and catching. In the previous year's game, some players expressed frustration at the way they had to press a button to catch the ball, but this was greatly simplified for the series' N64 swansong. ■

FACT

If you're the sort of person who takes all your N64 cartridges out of their boxes and just lines them up on the shelf, QB Club 2001 will annoy you because the cart is bright red instead of the usual grey.

NHL 99

Year 1998
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Canada / MBL Research

ALTHOUGH THE PLAYSTATION received five games in EA's popular NHL series of ice hockey games, the Nintendo 64 only got one of them. NHL 99 is similar to NBA Live 99 in that it's actually a port of the previous year's game, meaning while PlayStation owners received an updated title with new features like motion-captured animations and coaching drills, N64 owners were instead given a port of NHL 98. To be fair, that wasn't a bad game to begin with, and every NHL team and player is still included here (including the new expansion team, the Nashville Predators) along with commentary by Bill Clement. Sadly, though, it was to be the last NHL game on a Nintendo home system until NHL 2003 on the GameCube. ■

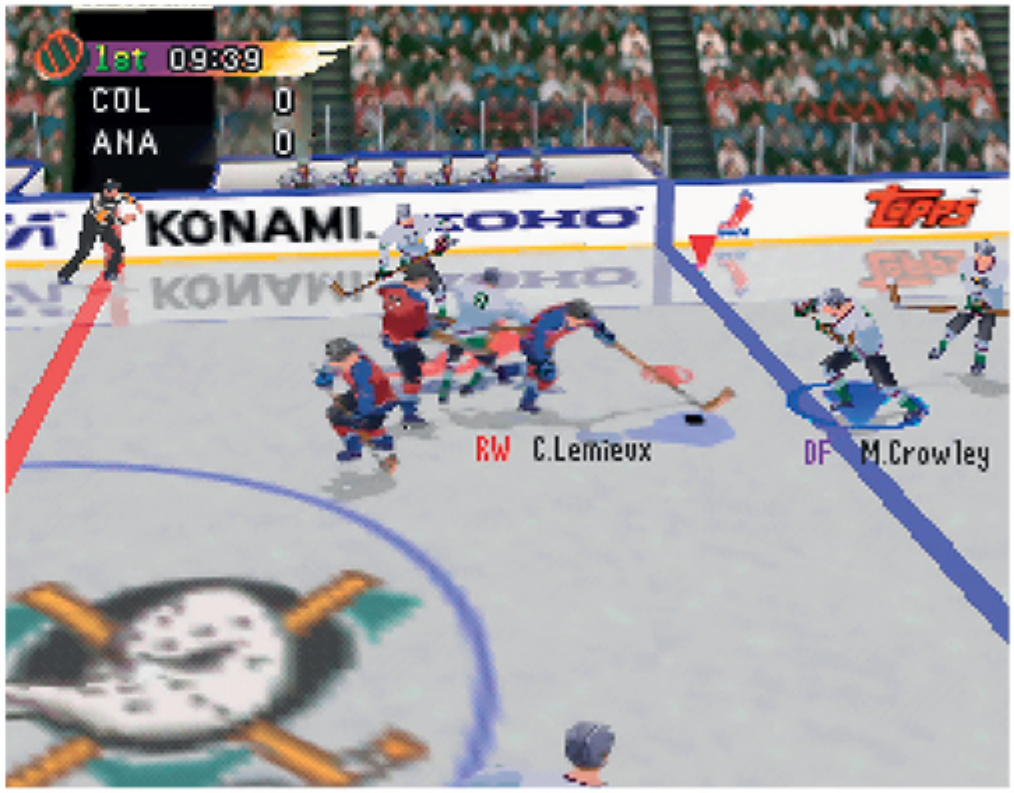
FACT

Bill Clement was the commentator on every NHL game from NHL 07 to NHL 14, before jumping ship to 2K Sports for a couple of games.

NHL BLADES OF STEEL 99

Year	1999
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEO

FOR ITS OWN Nintendo 64 take on ice hockey, Konami decided to go back in time and resurrect an old brand that was already synonymous with Nintendo. Blades of Steel was originally an arcade game back in 1987, but it was far better known for its NES port which arrived the following year. Blades of Steel was a much loved NES title, so Konami was clearly hoping that by bringing back its dormant IP it would instantly conjure up memories of childhood joy for long-time players (well, in North America at least: in Europe, it was renamed the significantly less nostalgic NHL Pro 99). The game contains the official NHL and NHLPA licences which means – as has practically become a catchphrase in these books by this point – that all team logos, nicknames and uniforms are present, as are all the rosters and player likenesses. Commentary in the game is handled by Randy Hahn, who was best known at the time for being the play-by-play commentator for the San Jose Sharks on NBC Sports California. With motion captured animations, a complete suite of fully 3D rendered NHL stadiums and a full season mode with stat tracking and a trading functionality, there wasn't really anything considered standard at the time that Blades of Steel 99 failed to offer. That said, it didn't necessarily offer anything remarkably unique either, and the press was fairly middling with its reviews as a result. ■



FACT

Konami went back to the well one more time for Blades of Steel 2000 on the PlayStation, which was roundly panned by critics.

NHL BREAKAWAY 98

Year	1998
Publisher	Acclaim Sports
Developer	Iguana Entertainment

CONSIDERING IT WAS dipping its toe in American football, baseball and basketball, it should come as no surprise that Acclaim had its own ice hockey series on the Nintendo 64 as well. NHL Breakaway 98 ticked all the boxes you'd expect from similar games, but its most notable feature was the way each player's height and weight had an actual impact on proceedings. Not only did this make them visibly distinct on screen, but the game's momentum-based checking system meant that a player's combination of weight and speed affected how they reacted when receiving a body check. The game's box claims it features hi-res graphics similar to Acclaim's NFL Quarterback Club series, but that isn't actually the case: it's certainly not 640x480 this time. ■

FACT

There may be an unfinished Sega Saturn port of this game out there somewhere. One was being worked on until Acclaim decided to stop supporting the console.

NHL BREAKAWAY 99

Year	1998
Publisher	Acclaim Sports
Developer	Iguana West

'ACCLAIM PULLED A Midway.' That was IGN's verdict while summing up NHL Breakaway 99. Released just nine months after NHL Breakaway 98 – meaning they actually both released in the same year despite their titles – the new release bore more than a passing resemblance to its predecessor, much like Midway's Wayne Gretzky 98 did. Naturally, the rosters had been updated to match the 1998–99 season, and the Nashville Predators expansion team had been added too. Those updates aside, though, there isn't much to separate both games: even the box continues to cite things like 'real-life player sizes and weights' as features even though they were in the '98 version. If you fancy owning one of these games, then, 'one' is probably the operative word here. ■

FACT

The cover star is Steve Yzerman of the Detroit Red Wings, an appropriate choice because he became known for doing the same thing twice in a row too (winning the Stanley Cup, in his case).

NIGHTMARE CREATURES

Year 1998
Publisher Activision
Developer Kalisto Entertainment

'ALL THIS MARIO is all well and good,' said some N64 fans I just made up in my head, 'but where's the gothic horror?' Such conveniently specific demands were met with Nightmare Creatures, a port that arrived more than a year after it appeared on PlayStation. The game takes place in London in 1834, which has fallen afoul to all manner of ungodly sights: the dead rising from their graves, people mutating into foul creatures, monsters roaming the streets (it was starting to look more like Glasgow than London, basically). This is the work of Adam Crowley, a crazed occultist trying to complete the work started in the 1600s by the devil-worshipping cult called the Brotherhood of Hectate. It's up to a priest called Ignatius Blackward (who can luckily also fight well with a big stick) and a biologist called Nadia Franciscus (who's a gymnast and a fencer) to find Crowley and put an end to his schemes before London is overrun.

FACT

The game claims that the Great Fire of London was started when Samuel Pepys, who it says was in the Brotherhood, set their HQ on fire. In reality, it was started by a fire at a bakery.

Nightmare Creatures is a third-person action adventure where the player can choose to control either Ignatius or Nadia, as they fight their way through numerous grotesque enemies, ranging from zombies and werewolves to more elaborate beasts like the Tames Monster (a giant octopus) and the Pepys Monster (which stands at nine feet tall and has three heads and three arms). As an early example of the genre it has its typical camera and control issues but its gothic theme sets it apart from most other games on the console. ■

NUCLEAR STRIKE 64

Year 1999
Publisher THQ
Developer EA / Pacific Coast Power & Light

THE FIRST THREE games in EA's Strike series – Desert Strike, Jungle Strike and Urban Strike – enjoyed success on the SNES, but when the fourth game, Soviet Strike, was released Nintendo fans had to go without. That changed for the fifth and final game, Nuclear Strike, which came to the Nintendo 64… albeit more than two years after it launched on the PlayStation and PC. The game's main antagonist is Colonel Beauford LaMonde, a former CIA spy who's gone a bit wrong and has stolen a nuclear weapon. It's up to the STRIKE covert operations force to take down LaMonde before he creates a global catastrophe. While the plot is obviously fictional, it does cut quite close to the bone at times, especially when LaMonde takes his nuke to Pyongyang and teams up with a North Korean dictator to kidnap a bunch of world leaders at a peace conference. The game plays like a polygonal update to the Desert Strike series would be expected to play, with a similar viewpoint to the 16-bit trilogy. Players mainly take control of a Super Apache helicopter (with other vehicles such as an M1 Abrams tank and a hovercraft available in certain missions), and are armed with a wide range of weaponry, with ammo, fuel and armour dumps conveniently located around the map for refilling purposes. This was sadly to be the final game in the Strike series (at the time of writing, at least). A teaser for a sixth game called Future Strike was shown at the end of the PlayStation version but this would become Future Cop: LAPD. ■

FACT

When you beat the game, a voice says: 'Thank you for flying Strike Air. We know you have a choice of flying games to play and we appreciate your taking the time to play us.'

OFF ROAD CHALLENGE

Year	1998
Publisher	Midway / GT Interactive
Developer	Avalanche Software

YOU ONLY NEED to flick through this book to see that Midway was a giant in the arcade racing scene in the mid '90s (not to mention the home console porting of said games). From the Cruis'n games to San Francisco Rush and its sequels, Midway was one of the leading names when it came to arcade racing during that period, alongside the likes of Sega and Namco. Off Road Challenge is a title that perhaps didn't reach the same level of recognition as some of Midway's other racers, but it absolutely deserves its moment of glory because it provides its own unique helping of over-the-top racing action, and adds an upgrade system that most other arcade racers didn't bother with.

As the title suggests, the game specialises in 4x4 off-road racing, where players have to race over all manner of surfaces in their aim to reach the finish line. Including hidden courses, there are nine in total – Mojave, El Paso, Vegas, Pikes Peak, Ol' South, Baja, Flagstaff, El Cajon and Guadalupe – each of which is packed with rough terrain, big jumps and ridiculous set pieces intended to catch your attention. Whether it's the biplane swooping over you as you enter a deserted wild west town, or the train whose line cuts over the track, leading to complete chaos when a driver inevitably drives into it, there's a solid helping of quirky moments designed to make each track more memorable than the basic dirt racing the title may immediately suggest.

FACT

Although his name was no longer associated with the series, Ivan 'Ironman' Stewart is still listed among the arcade game's credits as a technical advisor.

Although it may not be immediately obvious, Off Road Challenge is actually a sequel of sorts to Ivan 'Ironman' Stewart's Super Off Road, the classic 1989 arcade racer (the rights to the Off Road name moved to Midway when it acquired Tradewest in the mid '90s). Although the behind-the-car polygonal view makes it look very different to Super Off Road's single-screen, top-down viewpoint, the games do share a lot of similarities. Tracks still contain nitro boost and cash collectibles: the nitros work just like they did in Super Off Road with a short, sharp jolt forwards, while the cash can be added to your total winnings to upgrade your vehicle's acceleration, shocks, nitro, top speed and tyres. Speaking of vehicles, there are eight to choose from, with a cheeky little Toyota licence thrown in there for good measure. Although they're all off-road vehicles, their style (and therefore stats) can range quite drastically, from the small Baja buggy to more conventional-looking trucks (which is where Toyota comes into it), to even a hefty monster truck.

Off Road Challenge may not be one of the names that pops up when players mention the best N64 games (or even the best N64 racing games), and the game was criticised at the time for playing like an off-road version of Cruis'n USA. For some, though, the way it combines fast-paced arcade action with an upgrade-based progressions system means it may prove to be something of a hidden gem, and a relatively inexpensive one at that. ■

OGRE BATTLE 64: PERSON OF LORDLY CALIBER

Year 1999
Publisher Atlus USA / Nintendo
Developer Quest Corporation

IN THE 16-BIT era, Quest Corporation released Ogre Battle: The March of the Black Queen and Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together. Both games were known for two things: solid tactical RPG gameplay and sub-titles named after Queen songs. Ogre Battle 64 ticks at least one of those boxes, maybe two if it turns out Freddie Mercury had a secret box of unwritten songs nobody found.

As probably the most complex western release on the Nintendo 64 (as well as one of the biggest: Nintendo boasted that the cartridge was 320 megabits), it would take a number of pages to fully break down the game's plot and gameplay, so hopefully a brief overview will suffice. Players follow the life of Magnus Gallant, a military graduate who finds himself joining the revolution as civil war breaks out in his country. Battles are still turn-based tactical affairs but there's an extra layer on top of this in that you can control battalions of up to 50 troops: these can then be split into smaller units of up to five characters (which can be positioned on a 3x3 grid) and moved to different places on the battle map, with the general aim usually being to capture the enemy's stronghold. Not only does the game have an extremely detailed storyline, it also has a host of very different endings, making it easily one of the most time-consuming games of its era for players who want to see everything it offers. ■

FACT

This was the last Ogre Battle game released on consoles. Future spin-offs and remakes were released on the Neo Geo Pocket Color, the Game Boy Advance and the Sony PSP.

OLYMPIC HOCKEY 98

Year 1998
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive / Konami
Developer Treyarch Invention

EVERY BIG DEVELOPER has to cut its teeth somewhere, and Treyarch – now known these days as one of the teams behind the Call of Duty series – first started way back in 1998 with what was essentially a mod job on an existing ice hockey game. Olympic Hockey 98 is a modified version of Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey, which had already been developed for the N64 by Williams. Treyarch's job, then, was to take that existing game and turn it from an NHL game to an officially licensed Nagano 1998 Winter Olympics ice hockey game. Out came the official NHL team names, logos and uniforms, as well as most of the players, and replacing them were 14 national teams who were taking part in the 1998 Winter Olympics' ice hockey event (including Gretzy's native Canada, naturally). IGN was so infuriated at what it considered a straight copy of the Gretzky game that it scored the game 0, the only title it's ever done this with. That slightly over-dramatic move wasn't entirely fair, because in its defence (if only a slight defence) the game isn't entirely identical. For one thing, the rink is a little bigger due to Olympic regulations, and the game also shows each player's name underneath them during gameplay (which is handy, because all the players are still real, including Gretzky himself). But yup, other than that it's basically Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey with an international coat of paint slapped on top of it. ■

FACT

The Czech Republic won gold at the men's ice hockey at Nagano 1998 for the first time in its history, mainly because the country was only five years old at that time.

PAPER MARIO

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Intelligent Systems

PAPER MARIO STARTED life as a planned sequel to Square's Super Mario RPG. When Square decided to turn its attention to Final Fantasy VII (and let's not get started on the whole 'ditching the N64 to make it on PlayStation' thing), Nintendo instead turned to Intelligent Systems to create what would eventually be renamed Paper Mario (or Mario Story in Japan). The game would become such a well-loved adventure that it would ultimately be best known as the first game in the Paper Mario series, rather than the second game in the Super Mario RPG series.

The most immediately apparent reason for the game's success is its dramatically different art style. Whereas Super Mario RPG went down the Donkey Kong Country route by using pre-rendered 3D characters and turning them into sprites to give the game something of a three-dimensional look, Paper Mario went in entirely the opposite direction and instead took nods from the likes of PaRappa the Rapper, with every character in the game made out of paper. Make Mario change direction, for example, and he's so thin he almost becomes invisible for a split second as he turns around.

The game opens with Peach inviting Mario to party at her castle, but when Mario gets there Bowser shows up with the Star Rod, an extremely powerful magic wand that can grant any wish its owner desires. Turns out Bowser desires to be a complete sod, so he uses the Star Rod to uproot Peach's Castle and carry it off, sending Mario plummeting back down to the ground in the process. Mario then encounters apparitions of seven Star Spirits, which explain to him that they've been trapped inside magical cards and have to be released. If Mario can free them all, he'll gain a special power called the Star Beam, which will let him break Bowser's invincibility spell and give him the kicking he so clearly needs.

FACT

The first piece of concept art for the game was created in March 1997 by then-new employee Naohiko Aoyama, and looked like a 3D version of Super Mario World, with a polygonal world but the original flat SNES sprites standing in it.

Being an RPG, Paper Mario naturally has a battle system and it's a fairly straightforward one. Mario is armed with two standard attacks – a hammer and a jump attack – and each brings its own strengths and weaknesses depending on the enemies faced. Mario can also be joined by a second party member, from a selection of eight characters who join his crew as he encounters them throughout the story. It's a perfectly serviceable battle system, and was received well enough that elements of it have continued throughout many of Mario's RPG adventures.

What really made Paper Mario so memorable, however, wasn't the art style or combat, but its personality. The game really brings the Mushroom Kingdom into its own and makes it feel like a living environment, with each NPC sporting their own unique and endearing personality character traits. Even though Mario himself is a silent protagonist, his wide range of entertaining animations make him a perfectly expressive character despite his vow of silence. While its art style and battle system have aged well, then, it's Paper Mario's heart that makes it a hugely entertaining game to this day. ■

PAPERBOY

Year 1999
Publisher Midway
Developer High Voltage Software

THE ORIGINAL 1985 Paperboy was an iconic arcade release, and was so popular it led to countless ports on various home computers and consoles, including the NES and Game Boy (not to mention a sequel in 1991). This N64 reboot is an attempt to bring Paperboy into the polygonal age and in doing so it makes a number of changes to the way the game is played. As in its predecessor, the aim is to take control of your paperboy (or papergirl, if you're so inclined) and ride your bike along the neighbourhood, lobbing newspapers at subscribers' houses. If you can hit their doorstep that's good enough, but if you can land one right in their mailbox you'll get a bonus. For some reason, not everyone in the neighbourhood is a fan of the paperchild, and so there are plenty of hazards to avoid, or hit with papers for bonus points. Where the N64 version of paperboy differs is that there are now multiple routes to go around, and the player can now also double back to retry houses they may have missed, before a timer runs out. There's also a wider range of neighbourhoods to visit, each with their own different style and neighbours, as well as the occasional strange boss battle (such as fighting a bad scientist's giant gorilla). Paperboy ultimately split opinion at the time, with some publications praising it as entertaining and others slating it for being a pale imitation of the original source material. It seems one man's tabloid is another's broadsheet. ■

FACT

Among those given 'Special Thanks' in the credits are the inventor of the backspace key, the Pokémon Lickitung and Sir Isaac Newton.

PENNY RACERS

Year 1998
Publisher THQ / Takara
Developer Locomotive Corporation

THERE HAVE BEEN nearly 30 games in the Choro-Q series in Japan, of which Choro-Q 64 was the sixth. At that point, hardly any games in the series had been released in the west (only one PlayStation game a couple of years earlier), so when it came to North America and Europe as Penny Racers it was something of a novelty. As you can probably tell immediately by looking at the screenshot, the game is a racing title in which each of the cars is a cute, 'chibi' style toy vehicle. The main gimmick in Penny Racers is the ability to fully customise your car with 114 different parts, split into eight categories: Body, Engine, Tyre, Brake, Suspension, Armour, Extra (stuff like police lights, TAXI signs and snowboard racks to give your car more personality) and Special (which offers a range of weaponry like smoke bombs, landmines and cannonballs). There are nine tracks in the game, each with a different theme: Country, Harbour, Lakeside, Mountain and the like. Each track is quite simplistic, but there's actually a reason for this: Penny Racers also boasts another interesting mode that was fairly uncommon for its era, the ability to create your own tracks using a built-in track editor. You can create four tracks and save them to a Controller Pak or, curiously, edit the game's existing nine tracks in the same editor and save the changes to the cartridge. Customisation is very much the name of the game, then. ■

FACT

Choro-Q were actual real-life pullback toy cars which have been sold in Japan since 1978. They were also sold as Penny Racers in the west, and as Tonka Turbo Tricksters for a while.

PERFECT DARK

Year	2000
Publisher	Rare
Developer	Rare

WHEN YOU END up with a success as astronomical as that of GoldenEye 007, it stands to reason that a sequel is a cast-iron certainty. That's what Rare assumed when it started planning a follow-up based on *Tomorrow Never Dies*, but when EA outbid it and secured the rights to make the game, Rare was left without the iconic secret agent's services. The solution, then, was a simple one: if it couldn't use the world's most famous spy, it would create a new one. Bidding goodbye to James Bond, Rare instead said hello to Joanna Dark, a special agent working for the Carrington Institute, a research centre doubling as a secret espionage firm.

The game's plot is a complicated one, but essentially involves Joanna taking on a series of missions for Carrington which involve the notorious defence contractor corporation dataDyne, which is believed to be involved in sneaky activity involving alien technology. To say any more would be giving away too much, but the result is an epic adventure that sees Joanna infiltrating the likes of dataDyne's HQ, Area 51, Air Force One and even an alien spaceship. At its core the game plays very similarly to GoldenEye, which is no surprise given how well Rare nailed it the first time around. That said, Joanna is armed with even more clever gadgetry than Bond had at his disposal, with the game's sci-fi setting allowing for more elaborate gizmos like the CamSpy (a small remote controlled surveillance device which lets the player take photos while Joanna hides) and the IR scanner (a pair of special glasses Joanna can wear to see secret passages and hidden enemies, even in the dark).

There was even scope for real-life gadgetry to become part of the game, before real-world events put paid to those plans. The original idea was to have players take photos of themselves and their friends using the Game Boy Camera, then use the N64 Transfer Pak to import their faces into the game so they could play as themselves in multiplayer mode. However, after events such as the Columbine high school massacre, Rare decided it was probably best to remove any feature that let players kill their friends, even if it was all in the name of fun.

FACT

Nintendo of America took out fake recruitment ads in college newspapers pretending to be dataDyne, and even set up a fake website to make it look like a legit company.

Perfect Dark may have lacked the James Bond licence but it built on GoldenEye in every way imaginable, and as a result is widely regarded as one of the most technically accomplished Nintendo 64 games. That accomplishment came at a price, though, and players needed to own the N64 Expansion Pak to get the most out of the game. Without the Pak, players only had access to what Rare estimated was around 30 per cent of the game, mainly consisting of a handful of multiplayer deathmatch options. Players needed the pack, then, to not only unlock the rest of multiplayer but actually access the single-player campaign. For those who had one, though, the resulting masterpiece was worth it. ■

PGA EUROPEAN TOUR GOLF

Year	2000
Publisher	Infogrames
Developer	Infogrames Sheffield House

BY THE TIME PGA European Tour Golf arrived on the Nintendo 64, the console already had the likes of Mario Golf, CyberTiger and Waialae Country Club in its library for golfing fans to either enjoy or tolerate (depending on the game in question). What Infogrames' title brought to the party was an official PGA licence, something that none of the other N64 golf games offered. Fully making the most of this, PGA European Tour Golf includes a ridiculous 64 fully licensed real-life golfers, all fully recreated (in a pretty low-res style but even so). This meant the likes of Colin Montgomerie, Nick Faldo, Seve Ballesteros, Bernhard Langer and Ian Woosnam were in there, all singing and all dancing. Well, really just playing golf, mainly.

Players can choose to control any of these professional golfers in the game's standard Quick Game and Non-Tour Golf modes (the latter letting players choose between Strokeplay, Matchplay, Skins and Practice rounds), but if they want to take on a career they can't rely on these titans of the sport to see them through. Instead, the main Tour mode has you creating your own player from scratch, including their name, the colour of their shirt and trousers, their skin colour, nationality and whether they're wearing a hat (and yes, a little tartan Tam O'Shanter can be worn if you want to make it blatantly obvious that you're Scottish). You then start as a complete amateur and to have work your way through numerous events until you eventually reach the pros and go head-to-head against the famous faces contained in the game.

There are four real-life European courses to choose from: Quinta do Lago (a golf resort located in a gated community in the Algarve region of Portugal), the Kildare Hotel and Golf Club in Ireland (known as the K Club in the game and among cool golfy types), the Kings Course at the Kungsängen Golf Club in Sweden, and Druids Glen (the Irish course that hosted the Irish Open between 1996–1999). So clearly someone was a fan of Irish golf, and fair play to them. Commentary is provided by the BBC's much loved golf commentator Peter Aliss but the limitations of the Nintendo 64 cartridge mean he's hardly in the most talkative mood here, only really piping up to tell you when your strokes have been particularly impressive or disastrous. The game also includes a number of control systems, ranging from the traditional three-press system used in most golfing titles to a two-press system (where you hold the A button to set the power), and systems called X Swing and Y Swing (where you use move the Control Stick either left-to-right or down-to-up to swing). The reaction to PGA European Tour Golf was mixed, but if you're looking for an officially licensed PGA Tour game on the N64, this is the best by default, purely because there are no other options available to you. ■

FACT

Lee Westwood isn't one of the 64 playable golfers in the game, which is slightly awkward given that he won the European Tour Golfer of the Year award in both 1998 and 2000.

PILOTWINGS 64

Year 1996
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD / Paradigm
Simulation

THE ORIGINAL SNES version of Pilotwings was similar to F-Zero in that one of its main purposes was to show off the abilities of the console, in particular its pseudo-3D Mode 7 technique. As well as this, however, Pilotwings was also an attempt to take a genre that was usually associated with home computers – the flight simulator – and deliver it to a console audience in an engaging way. As ground-breaking as the first game was, however, it was its N64 sequel Pilotwings 64 that took its predecessor's initial concept and took it quite literally to another dimension, massively changing the way the game was experienced.

The first change lies in the hardware itself, or more specifically its controller. Early impressions of the N64 may have concluded that its analogue Control Stick was revolutionary for controlling Mario, but it was no less transformative to Pilotwings. By essentially giving players a flight stick in their own hands, the game offered a level of control way beyond the first game's D-Pad. Naturally, that's only part of the story: by also switching from Mode 7 to true polygonal 3D, the flat stages of the first game were replaced by actual detailed landscapes with elevation and landmarks to take into account while flying. The game is set in four islands, each with their own distinct characteristics thanks to their polygonal detail. Holiday Island is an amusement resort with theme parks and golf courses, Ever-Frost Island is your token snow world (though there's an oil refinery in there to mix things up a bit), Crescent Island is a hotel resort with a beach and some towns to explore, and Little States – the most iconic of the four – is a miniature version of the US, with Mario in Mount Rushmore.

FACT

One of the playable characters is Lark, a young boy. His design is based on Nester, the mascot character who appeared in *Nintendo Power* magazine in North America.

While there are a variety of bonus vehicles to unlock there are three main modes of transport in the game: hang gliding, a jetpack and a gyrocopter. Naturally, each handles in a very different way. It isn't just the aircraft you use either, as the pilot now adds an extra variable to the mix. Whereas the first game simply cast you as an unnamed beginner, here you can choose between six different pilots, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Lark and Kiwi, for example, are smaller characters and therefore can steer the hang glider easier, while Hawk and Robin are on the heavier end of the scale and struggle with the hang glider, but are easier to control with the jetpack because they aren't affected by wind so much.

As one of just three launch titles in Japan and two in North America, Pilotwings 64 is often overshadowed by the presence of Super Mario 64 alongside it. While it was undoubtedly the plumber-based platformer that stole the show on day one, however, it was perhaps Pilotwings that best showed what the console – and polygonal gaming in general – was truly capable of in terms of exploring new worlds. ■

POKÉMON PUZZLE LEAGUE

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo Software Technology

IF YOU'VE READ the *SNES Encyclopedia* (still available at all good book sellers, if you'll pardon the cheap plug), you'll have already read about how Nintendo repurposed its Panel de Pon puzzle game as Tetris Attack in the West in an attempt to make the game a little more appealing to Western players. Nintendo decided to try the same trick again for a Nintendo 64 sequel, but this time there was no Japanese equivalent: while Nintendo did indeed create an N64 Panel de Pon game in Japan, it ultimately wasn't released, and was instead included as part of Nintendo Puzzle Collection for the GameCube. As a result, Pokémon Puzzle League – a special version of Panel de Pon based on the Pokémon animated TV series – has no Japanese equivalent and is one of the few Pokémon games to have only been released in the west.

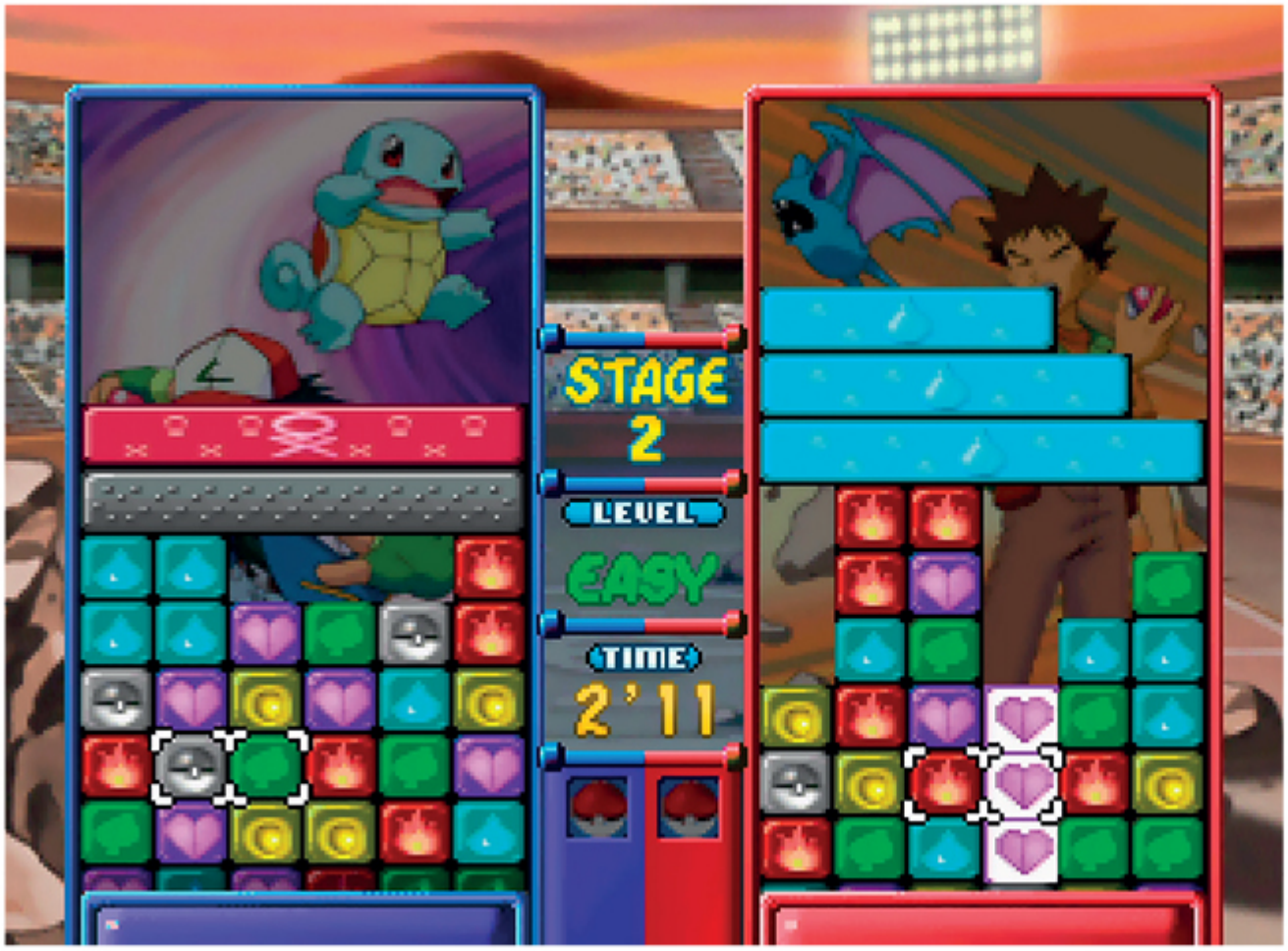
The game plays exactly like other games in the Panel de Pon series. Players are given a 'well' which is filled with coloured blocks, and have a small cursor that's two blocks wide. Using this cursor, players can swap two blocks that are next to each other (or slide a block sideways if there's nothing next to it) in an attempt to match up horizontal or vertical lines of three or more blocks of the same colour. Extra rows of blocks are slowly ascending and pushing the well upwards, so the aim is to keep shuffling and

clearing blocks in order to stem the flow and make sure the ever-rising stack doesn't eventually reach the top of the screen. It's also popular in versus mode, and that's the main focus here (though it can be played solo should you so choose).

Although it's a puzzle game, there's actually a plot here due to its Pokémon theme. Ash and Pikachu are enjoying a well-earned break when Professor Oak calls Ash and tells him he's been chosen to take part in the official Puzzle League tournament. Ash heads to the tournament, where he takes on a series of opponents that generally follows the sequence of the main games and the animated series: first he takes on his rival Gary, then the eight Kanto gym leaders, then the Elite Four, with the likes of Team Rocket and Giovanni appearing throughout the story to keep things interesting.

FACT

The Game Boy Color got its own Pokémon themed Panel de Pon game, released a few months later, called Pokémon Puzzle Challenge. This one actually was released in Japan.



Along with its standard Panel de Pon gameplay, the game also offers an alternative 3D mode in which the game doesn't take place on a flat grid but instead has the player rotating a large cylinder. The play area in this mode is 18 blocks wide instead of just six, giving the player a lot more space to shuffle their blocks around. There's also a separate Puzzle mode where you're given some scenarios and have to clear the board with a set number of moves. In all, it continues to be regarded as one of the better Pokémon spin-offs… but it wasn't the only one, as you'll see later. ■

POKÉMON SNAP

Year 1999
Publisher Nintendo
Developer HAL Laboratory

UNTIL THE POKÉMON Company finally decided to grant their wishes in 2021, a sequel to Pokémon Snap was one of the most frequently made requests by fans of the Pokémon series. While New Pokémon Snap on the Nintendo Switch scratched their itch with a brilliant follow-up, the fact that itch remained for more than two decades is a testament to how well-loved the original Pokémon Snap was and still is.

Players take on the role of Todd Snap, a boy whose name conveniently matches his favourite pastime, much like an agricultural worker called Douglas Farmer or a professional bobsleigh rider called Alfred Winterbottom. Todd has been recruited by Professor Oak to travel to Pokémon Island, an idyllic paradise where Pokémon freely roam without any pesky humans bothering them. It's up to Todd to fill the Pokémon Report, a sort of miniature Pokédex just for the island, by taking photos of all 63 species of Pokémon that can be found living there. You do this by riding the Zero-One, a small buggy that takes a set route through each stage. Because the Zero-One can't be controlled and moves by itself, the game is essentially an on-rails affair where the player focuses solely on snapping photos of the Pokémon they see along each route (so it's a sort of light gun point-and-shooter, if you will).

The twist is that players can only take 60 photos on each trip – so you can't go snap-happy – and when the route ends you can only select one photo of each species of Pokémon to submit to the Professor for analysis. Once you've chosen your favourite pics, the Professor will look at them and give them a score based on how close the Pokémon is to the centre of the frame, how much of the photo it takes up, and whether they're doing anything particularly special. A photo of a Meowth's back as it stands off in the distance will be worth a pittance, for example, while a close-up, perfectly centred, of a Meowth expressing surprise is worth significantly more. It's a paparazzi simulator, basically.

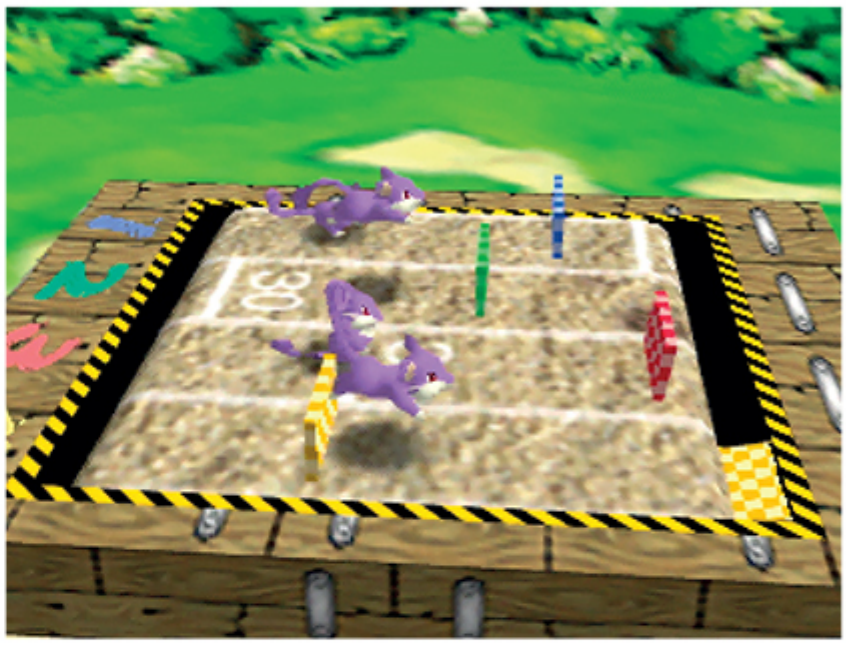
Over time, you're given new items and gadgets that you can use to get better photos. An apple, for example, can attract certain Pokémon over to you so you can get a better shot of them. Meanwhile, the Pokéflute is a special musical instrument which affects Pokémon in different ways: it can make some sleeping ones wake up, it makes others dance, it can even hatch eggs sometimes. What made Pokémon Snap so compelling was that although it was essentially just a photography sim, the fact that each route was preset meant there was something compelling about going back through each of the seven routes multiple times with different tools, trying to discover and snap new sights you hadn't seen on previous runs. The new Switch version may have more to see and do, but it hasn't diminished the quality of the N64 original one iota. ■

FACT

The game was originally going to be based on Jack & The Beanstalk, but development was struggling until it was decided to put Pokémon in it. The intro says 'Jack and Beans' at one point: that's a reference to the team who worked on it.

POKÉMON STADIUM

Year	1999
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo EAD / HAL Laboratory



THE ENORMOUS SUCCESS of Pokémon Red and Blue (and subsequently Pokémon Yellow) on the Game Boy created an all new phenomenon for Nintendo in the late '90s. As widely loved as the Game Boy titles were, however, many players dreamt of what their turn-based battles could look like on more powerful hardware. Nintendo and HAL Laboratory granted their wish by releasing Pokémon Stadium, a Nintendo 64 spin-off that allowed players to finally see Pokémon battles in full polygonal 3D.

The game consists of two main modes: Stadium consists of four tournaments against a variety of CPU-controlled trainers, who you have to beat in succession in order to win each cup. Then there's Gym Leader Castle, which is loosely based on the path the player takes through the main Game Boy games and has you facing off against all the Kanto Gym Leaders, followed by the Elite Four then your rival. If such formality is a bit intimidating for you, there are also smaller modes like Battle Now (which gives each side a random selection of Pokémon), the Kid's Club (where you could play a selection of mini-games) or even a Gallery (where you can take photos of your Pokémon, save them to a Controller Pak and get them printed out as stickers in participating stores).

There was just one problem with all this: players had spent tens, maybe even hundreds of hours levelling up and training their Pokémon in the handheld games, so was Pokémon Stadium just going to ditch all that? Thankfully not: the game was bundled with the Transfer Pak, which allowed players to plug in their copy of Pokémon Red, Blue or Yellow and import over their handheld creatures, meaning all that hard work hadn't gone to waste after all. As for those who either didn't own the Game Boy titles or whose Pokémon were all hopeless, the game also gives players the option to choose 'Rental' Pokémon instead. This gives them a list of selected Pokémon from the full list of 151, letting them choose their own team of six and use those in the game's various battle modes.

FACT

The game features a mode called GB Tower, where you can play the Game Boy version on your TV. If you win certain cups in Stadium mode you can speed it up 2x and 3x, making it a great way to level up your handheld teams through grinding.

That said, for fans of the handheld games, there were extra benefits that came with using the Transfer Pak instead of just opting for the Rental Pokémon. Players using their cartridge had access to a special 3D version of the Pokédex, allowing them to properly study the characters in their handheld Pokédex in full 3D (not to mention full colour) for the first time. The game also provides special prizes for winning the Gym Leader Castle mode: specifically, Pokémon that can be impossible to catch in the handheld game without trading. Take the three starters, for example: in the original western versions of Pokémon Red and Blue, after choosing your starter you won't be able to find the other two in the game. By completing Pokémon Stadium, they can get the other two (along with other species they can't get) and copy them to their handheld cartridge. ■

POKÉMON STADIUM 2

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD

AS POPULAR AS Pokémon Stadium was (it sold around 4 million copies worldwide), it wasn't long before Nintendo released Pokémon Gold, Silver and Crystal, its next generation of handheld RPGs which added another 100 creatures and made Pokémon Stadium obsolete in the process. The solution to this was obvious: a new Pokémon Stadium, which updated everything the previous game offered and included support for the 100 new second generation Pokémon. For the most part, the game's structure is similar to that of its predecessor, with the Stadium mode once again providing four tournaments (albeit different ones this time) and the return of the Gym Leader Castle. The latter mode is longer this time, though, because once you defeat all the Johto gym leaders and Elite Four, you then unlock the gym leaders from Kanto, the previous generation's region. The other major addition to Pokémon Stadium 2 is Earl's Pokémon Academy, an enormous learning resource for all things Pokémon. Not only does it have a load of tutorials which teach players the ins and outs of Pokémon battling, it also contains a huge database containing information on every Pokémon, move, item and type match-up in the Game Boy titles. Players can also take tests to see how well they know the game's more intricate mechanics. A new Move Re-learner mode also lets players connect their Game Boy cartridge and teach any of their Pokémon moves that they had previously forgotten through levelling up. This is something that's commonplace in Pokémon games these days, but had been impossible until then. ■

FACT

Because this was actually the third Pokémon Stadium game in Japan (see Pocket Monsters Stadium in the Japanese section of the book), the game was named Pokémon Stadium Gold & Silver there.

POLARIS SNOCROSS

Year 2000
Publisher Vatical Entertainment
Developer Vicarious Visions

IF YOU AREN'T familiar with snocross, it's essentially a snow-based version of motocross where the specialised motorbikes are replaced by specialised snowmobiles. Despite the change of equipment, the races are quite similar, with sharp turns and huge jumps very much the order of the day. When it comes to snowmobiles, I'm reliably informed there's no better manufacturer than Polaris: come at me, Bombardier and Alpina fans (I have zero idea what I'm talking about). As such, publisher Vatical Entertainment decided to capitalise on that presumably thriving snocross market with the release of Polaris SnoCross, a title that proudly claims on the box to be 'the first snowmobiling game for the Nintendo 64' (a claim that unsurprisingly went unchallenged). The game contains 16 licensed Polaris sleds, with such diverse names as the 500 XC SP, 600 XC SP, 700 XC and 800 XC. Its main Championship mode consists of three leagues named Sport, Semi-Pro and Pro, and if you can beat all those you'll unlock the Special Event, where the opponents are extremely hard and the game selects random tracks from the nine available each time you play. Special mention has to go to the painfully awkward 'how do you do fellow kids' style blurb on the back of the box, which boasts that the game lets you perform 'bomb diggety tricks' and features a 'real physics engine [which] begs gravity for mercy'. Which seems to imply that it can't cope with gravity's dominance and that gravity is very much in control, which I'm assuming isn't the vibe they were going for. ■

FACT

Polaris was co-founded by Edgar Hetteen, who is called the 'father of the snowmobile' by the Snowmobile Hall of Fame. In related news, it turns out there's a Snowmobile Hall of Fame.

POWER RANGERS LIGHTSPEED RESCUE

Year 2000
Publisher THQ
Developer Mass Media Games

BASED ON THE eighth series of *Power Rangers*, Lightspeed Rescue has you playing as everyone's favourite 'tokusatsu' Japanese superheroes as they try to save the day for the umpteenth time. On this particular occasion, the target is Mariner Bay, which is being attacked by Diabolico and his evil forces. The Power Rangers have to head to Mariner Bay and defeat Diabolico's goons to restore peace to the area. The game consists of four different play styles: Ranger Rescue stages have you running around as one of the Power Rangers, following arrows to reach certain goals (like destroying items, rescuing hostages or what have you). Vehicle Rescue stages put you behind the wheel of one of the Rangers' many vehicles such as a fire truck or ambulance and tasks you with putting out fires, destroying hazardous materials and the like. Hover Jet Mode has you controlling the Green Ranger's jet in a third-person viewpoint, while Arena mode lets you hop into the Lightspeed Megazord for some giant mech action as you battle one-on-one with another large monster. Lightspeed Rescue was notorious for receiving extremely low reviews from some publications. US magazine *EGM* gave it a score of 2/10, stating that it 'appears to have been slapped together with little regard for quality or replay value'. Meanwhile, in the UK, *N64 Magazine* scored it 9 per cent and declared it to be even worse than Superman 64, particularly bemoaning the fact it takes around an hour to finish the entire game. ■

FACT

The TV series was based on *Kyuukyuu Sentai GoGoFive*, the 23rd instalment of the Super Sentai series in Japan.

THE POWERPUFF GIRLS: CHEMICAL X-TRACTION

Year 2001
Publisher BAM! Entertainment
Developer VIS Entertainment / Asylum Entertainment

CARTOON NETWORK'S QUIRKY animated series about a trio of kindergartener superhero girls was a huge success around the turn of the millennium, spawning a comic book series, a feature-length movie and the inevitable range of video game tie-ins. The Nintendo 64 offering revolves around a pie the girls have been baking. After Bubbles decides to try to enhance the flavour by adding some Chemical X – the special formula that gives them their strength – the pie is then stolen by their simian arch-nemesis Mojo Jojo, who proceeds to hand out slices to the various villains that populate Townsville. It's up to the girls to beat up all of said villains and recover the pie before anarchy reigns. Chemical X-traction is a one-on-one fighting game which takes place in a series of open 3D environments, similar to Capcom's Dreamcast fighting game Power Stone. As in that title, each arena is filled with various objects which players can throw or kick around to try and do damage to their opponent, adding another layer of chaos to the mix. As well as the main Story mode, there's also a Simulation mode, where players can choose to fight as not only the girls themselves, but any of the villains they face, including the likes of Mojo Jojo, Fuzzy Lumpkins, Sedusa and HIM. Despite trying something a little different from your typical video game tie-in, Chemical X-traction reviewed rather poorly thanks to its awkward close-quarters combat controls. ■

FACT

Developer VIS Entertainment was based in Edinburgh, Scotland. Its following game after Chemical X-traction was the notably less child-friendly riot simulator State of Emergency for Rockstar Games.

PREMIER MANAGER 64

Year 1999
Publisher Gremlin Interactive
Developer Dynamic Multimedia

OF THE HANDFUL of Nintendo 64 games that were exclusive to Europe, Premier Manager 64 is probably the one that's most bewildering to certain North American collectors. It's a football management simulator in which players take control of an English football (soccer) team and try to guide them to success. There are two different modes available: Manager mode lets you pick any team from any of the top four tiers of English football, meaning if you fancy yourself as a Liverpool manager you can opt to take over as manager right away and set about trying to win the league with the likes of Michael Owen, Robbie Fowler and Jamie Redknapp (all the player names are real in this game). Alternatively, for those who prefer to earn their success, Career mode starts you off with a choice of the 10 lowest-rated teams in the third division (known these days as League Two) and tasks you with working your way up to Premier League success either by taking the team up through the leagues via promotion, or by building your reputation to secure a move to a bigger team. While you don't actually get to see the games playing out during matches – the game is quite basic when it comes to the in-match experience – you do at least get to see highlights after they end. These are rendered in the same game engine as PlayStation title Actua Soccer 3, and contain (limited) commentary by English football commentator Barry Davies. ■

FACT

Premier Manager 64 is actually a port of PlayStation title Premier Manager Ninety-Nine, a game which has always annoyed me for spelling out the year in its title.

QUAKE 64

Year 1998
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer id Software / Midway San Diego

ID SOFTWARE'S DOOM has received so many ports over the years (and has continued to do so) that it's become something of an internet meme by this point. On the other hand, ports of id's subsequent iconic shooter, Quake, were far less prevalent back when it was released. Indeed, the Sega Saturn was the only console to receive a port at the time, making this Nintendo 64 version one of the few ways console players could experience id's gritty shooter. The N64 port, which was handled by the same team responsible for the excellent Doom 64, gives players an almost complete rendition of the PC title. I say 'almost' because the N64 version is missing a few stages, as well as the opening hub section. Whereas in the PC original the hub let players choose which chapter (and therefore difficulty level) they wanted to play, here players instead have to play through all 25 of the game's levels in order. One thing the N64 version could boast, however, was the addition of a two-player deathmatch mode, including all six maps from the PC game as well as its own unique seventh map called The Court of Death (which is as cheery as it sounds). Ultimately, Quake 64 was a solid port of a critically acclaimed PC title, and while its controls were certainly more unwieldy than the mouse and keyboard the game was designed for, it delivered a relatively accurate experience despite this. ■

FACT

The nailgun ammo in the PC version has the logo of industrial rock band Nine Inch Nails on it, because they composed the soundtrack. The N64 version's soundtrack wasn't by them, and the 'NIN' logo is gone too.

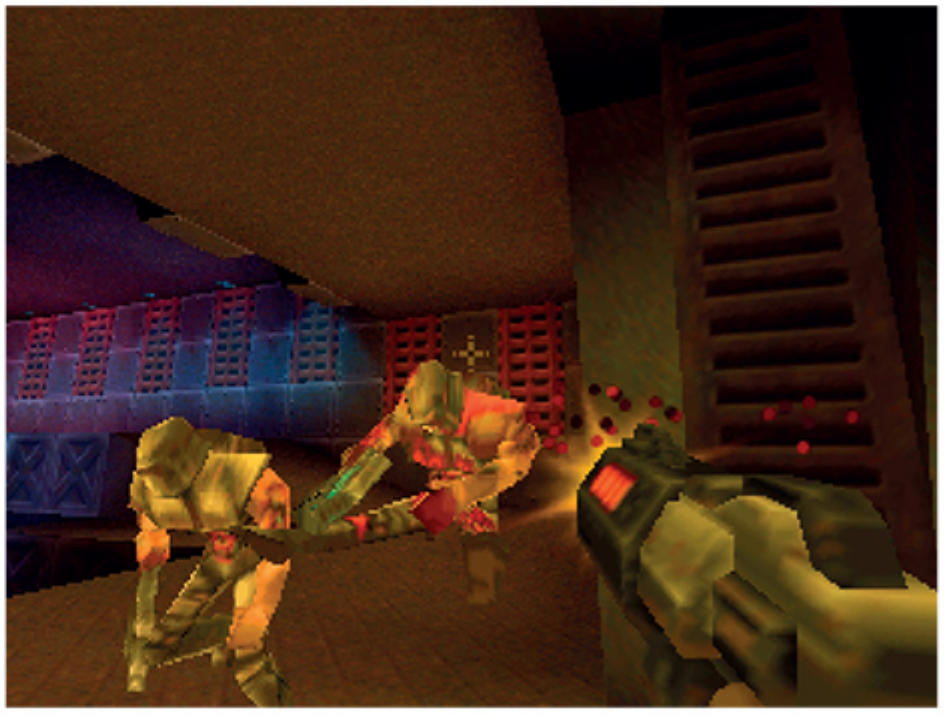
QUAKE II

Year 1999
Publisher Activision
Developer id Software / Raster Productions

ALTHOUGH THE NINTENDO 64 port of Quake was put together by the same team who made Doom 64, some were disappointed that the Quake port was similar to the PC version (its missing levels aside) rather than a completely original game like Doom 64 was. To make up for this, Quake II delivered just that: an entirely new adventure running on a ported version of the Quake II engine. Although the N64 version of Quake II only offers 20 stages compared to the 39 available on PC, most of these levels are brand new while others have been taken from mission packs created for the PC version, meaning to all intents and purposes this was a new journey. The game also includes a brand new ambient soundtrack by Aubrey Hodges (who composed a similarly ambient score for Quake 64, incidentally). The previous game's two-player mode was also given a revamp, with full support now offered for up to four players in split-screen, a far more convenient way to enjoy Deathmatches than setting up a PC LAN party. Quake II's controls were arguably even less intuitive than those of its predecessor, because the game's renewed emphasis on aiming up and down led to the developers mapping aiming to the Control Stick and movement to the C buttons, something very few games of the era attempted. Once you get the hang of this, however, the N64 version of Quake II is an entertaining companion piece to the main PC version. ■

FACT

Nvidia released a special PC version of Quake II in 2019 called Quake II RTX, which added support for ray-tracing for graphics cards that supported it.



QUEST 64

Year 1999
Publisher THQ / Konami / Imagineer
Developer Imagineer

KNOWN IN EUROPE as Holy Magic Century, Quest 64 is a visually pleasant role-playing game developed by Japanese studio Imagineer. The game takes place in Celtland, a picturesque island which is definitely nothing like Ireland, honest mate. Peace in Celtland is ensured by Eletale's Book, a powerful magical tome guarded by the Spirit Tamers, guardians who can use the book's magic to make sure nothing gets out of hand. This all goes awry when the book is stolen by an evil being who then uses its contents to cast deadly spells over the land, causing strange beasts to appear in the countryside. Young Brian is an apprentice Spirit Tamer, whose dad has disappeared on a mission to get the book back. Brian vows to head out, find his old man, recover Eletale's Book and restore peace to Irel… um, Celtland. Quest 64 is as straightforward an RPG as its plot suggests, though it does borrow some interesting elements from other RPG titles. Combat is similar to Chrono Trigger, for example, in that battles with enemies take place as and when you encounter them, rather than cutting to a separate battle screen. Meanwhile, as in Final Fantasy II, you don't just level up all your stats at once but instead level up specific stats depending on how you battle. You can also collect spirits that let you decide specifically which of your elemental magics to upgrade, meaning you have more choice over which of Brian's abilities improve over time. ■

FACT

Imagineer started work on a sequel to Quest 64 which was going to be set 100 years in the future and let you choose between a magician called Leon and a swordswoman called Sophia. The game was scrapped early in development.

RACING SIMULATION: MONACO GRAND PRIX

Year	1999
Publisher	Ubisoft
Developer	Ubisoft Paris

DESPITE THE TITLE, Racing Simulation should actually be called Racing Simulation 2 because it's a sequel to a game released on PC in 1997. This successor, known primarily as simply Monaco Grand Prix in North America, is technically based on the Formula 1 World Championship, but because Ubisoft didn't secure any official F1 licensing this means all the car manufacturers and driver names are completely fictional. Say hello, then, to the likes of Humigger instead of Schumacher, Colyart instead of Coulthart and Mill instead of Hill.

That said, the 17 tracks are all still accurate (though Monaco is the only one with an official license, all the rest have been renamed) and a number of sponsors that feature in F1 are present here too. Meaning the game straddles an odd halfway house (if you can straddle a house) between authenticity and artistic licence.

FACT

Although the officially licensed F1 Racing Championship (seen elsewhere in this book) is technically Racing Simulation 3, a game by that name was released in 2002 for PC and PS2. Which is nice and confusing.

Speaking of halfway houses, the game was generally praised for offering a depiction of F1 that could be as realistic or arcade-like as you wanted, making it an ideal entry point for players keen to get into Formula 1 games but intimidated by the level of detail offered by the likes of F1 World Grand Prix. Its slightly more forgiving nature – it's possible to turn off damage and penalties and just plough through packs of cars unscathed and unpunished – made it more accessible to those just seeking a good time without worrying too much about the fact they were racing like a maniac. ■

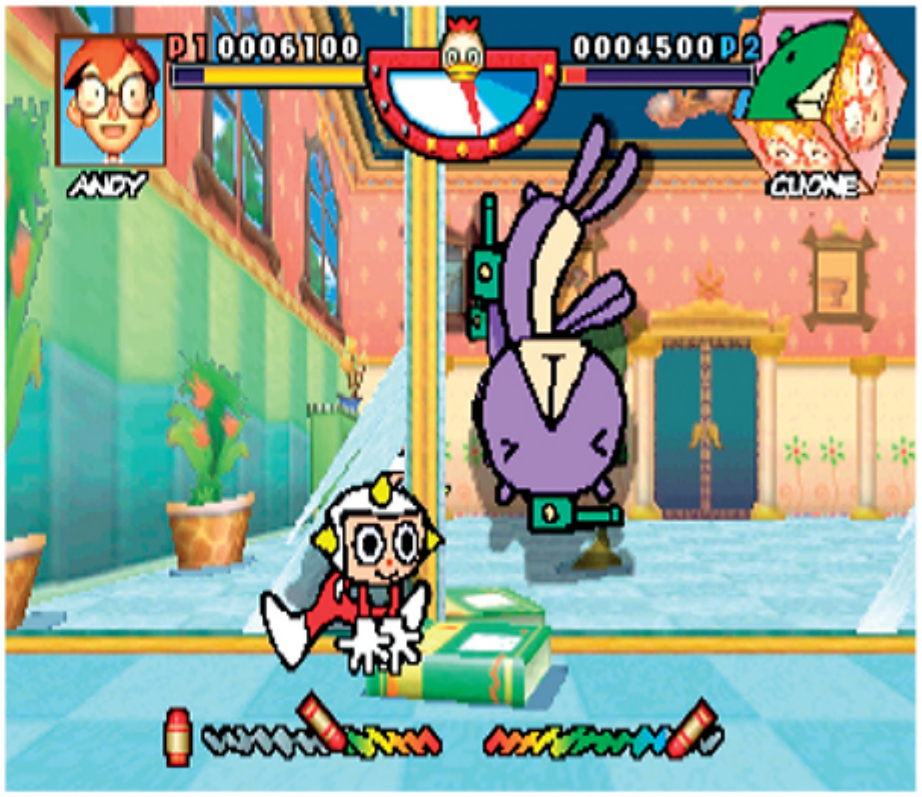
RAKUGAKIDS

Year	1998
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEK

ONE OF THE most stylish games released on the Nintendo 64, Rakugakids is a one-on-one fighting game in which all the characters look like they were drawn by children ('rakugaki' means 'doodle' in Japanese). The game itself isn't anything revolutionary when it comes to its fighting mechanics: like many others of its ilk it borrows liberally from Street Fighter II with three punch buttons and three kick buttons, as well as a series of special moves which are mostly executed using the classic 'quarter circle' movement required to pull off Ryu's hadouken in Capcom's seminal title. Where the game obviously stands out, then, is in its art style: fights take place in brightly coloured polygonal stages and the fighters themselves are completely flat, similar to the likes of PaRappa the Rapper and Paper Mario. You've got the likes of Astronots (a spaceman who can attack enemies with his ray gun), Robot C.H.O. (a droid who can transform into other metallic items like a car or a bin), and – the best of the bunch – Beartank. As the name suggests, he's a giant green bear who can transform into a tank, all while constantly sleeping, because reasons. What Rakugakids lacks in inventive gameplay mechanics it clearly has in style and charm, and its wonderful doodle-based art style makes it one of the most entertaining N64 games released outside of North America, meaning collectors in that region would be wise to hunt it down. ■

FACT

Rakugakids was produced by Shigeharu Umezaki, who would go on to become the chairman of Good-Feel, the studio behind Kirby's Epic Yarn and Yoshi's Woolly World.



RALLY CHALLENGE 2000

Year	1999
Publisher	Imagineer / SouthPeak Interactive
Developer	Genki

A LOT OF players didn't realise that MRC: Multi Racing Championship actually got a sequel. Rally Challenge 2000 was also developed by Genki, and while its predecessor split its available vehicles into road cars and rally cars, this one ditches the former and focuses solely on the latter (hence the title). There are nine cars to choose from, all of which are officially licensed by nine different manufacturers: Mitsubishi, Subaru, Toyota, Nissan, Seat, Skoda, Volkswagen, Proton and Hyundai. There are two modes available, Arcade and Championship. Arcade mode is similar to Sega Rally, in that you take on a series of tracks, starting in last place and trying to work your way up to first over the course of all the races combined (as opposed to doing it in every race). Meanwhile, Championship mode has you taking on all nine of the game's tracks, one at a time, with you earning points based on your finishing position at the end of each race. Whereas Arcade has you overtaking cars to increase your position, Championship mode is more like proper rally racing, where you race on your own with the aim being to clear each stage with a faster time than your opponents (that said, there are still cars on the track to put you off). The handling has a heavy emphasis on drifting, meaning the game feels like the closest thing to Sega Rally that Nintendo 64 owners could get (with the possible exception of Top Gear Rally). ■

FACT

Genki became insolvent in 2008. It was renamed CLK, and the game software side was spun off into a new company called GK (which was later renamed Genki) while CLK was dissolved.

RAMPAGE WORLD TOUR

Year	1998
Publisher	Midway / GT Interactive
Developer	Game Refuge / Saffire

THE ORIGINAL RAMPAGE was released in 1986 and was a hugely entertaining arcade game based on giant monster movies, most notably *King Kong* and *Godzilla*. World Tour is a sequel of sorts, though it could be argued that it's more of a remake given that the gameplay mechanics are more or less identical to those of the '80s original. The game opens with news of an explosion at a shady research facility called Scumlabs (why would you name it that, seriously). The explosion leads to the escape of three enormous, mutated monsters: George the gorilla, Lizzy the lizard and Ralph the werewolf. It's up to the military to stop their reign of terror, but here's the twist: in Rampage games you aren't the military, you're the monsters. Playing as either George, Lizzie or Ralph, you have to destroy a series of cities by climbing their buildings and punching them repeatedly until they crumble and collapse in a pile of dust (while being sure to jump off them before they do, so you don't tumble to the ground too and take damage). Pesky humans will attempt to wear down your energy by firing missiles at you, but you can put paid to these by grabbing them and swallowing them whole, replenishing some health in the process. Like the arcade game, the N64 port of Rampage World Tour supports three players, meaning if you can coax two pals into joining you, you can unleash hell as a team. ■

FACT

The 2018 *Rampage* movie starring Dwayne Johnson refers to its giant gorilla and wolf as George and Ralph respectively, but never gives a name to its giant crocodile.

RAMPAGE 2: UNIVERSAL TOUR

Year 1999
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Avalanche Software

PUTTING ASIDE THE fact that Rampage 2: Universal Tour's title insults the original '80s Rampage by implying that it's the second game in the series rather than the third, it's business as usual in this follow-up. This time George, Lizzie and Ralph have all been captured and are being put on display to the general public to teach them a lesson. As luck would have it, however, Scumlabs' brand new facility explodes again, causing three brand new monsters to escape. This time players can choose between Boris the rhino, Curtis the mouse and Ruby the lobster as they make their way to New York, Tokyo and London to rescue the original trio. Once all three of the previous game's monsters have been released, there's a twist in the story. Aliens suddenly invade Earth and it quickly becomes clear that the monsters are the only force strong enough to stop them. The rest of the game, then, has you protecting the planet instead of wrecking it, by destroying alien bases instead of cities. This lends the game more of a sci-fi touch (well, comparatively speaking, since the whole thing was pretty sci-fi to begin with). Despite the new plot, Universal Tour plays just like the previous games in the Rampage series, with players climbing buildings and punching them multiple times to knock them down. As such, anyone who didn't get along with the previous games wouldn't find anything here to change their minds. ■

FACT

The cities imprisoning each monster are references to famous monster movies: George is in New York (*King Kong*), Lizzie is in Tokyo (*Godzilla*) and Ralph is in London (*An American Werewolf in London*).

RAT ATTACK

Year 2000
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Pure Entertainment

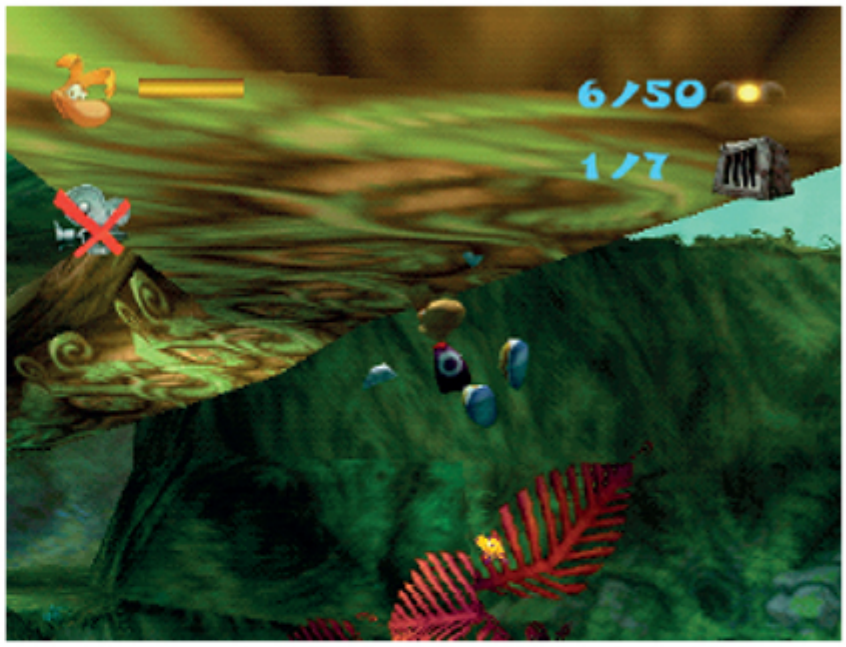
MORE THAN 40 years ago, a pair of lab rats called Washington and Jefferson were blasted into space as part of an early space experiment (you probably don't remember it, but trust me, it happened). They have now returned back to Earth, and they're packing some heat. Deciding they're going to start a rodent revolution, the pair have gathered an army of rats and want to take over the planet. Only one group can stop them: the Scratch Cats, an elite group of feline freedom fighters. As your Scratch Cat of choice, you have to capture all the rats on each level and prevent the revolution from taking place. Players are armed with the Eraticator, a special device which can be used to capture any rats that are roaming around. To use it, players have to lay down the trap's rectangular boundary (similar to dragging a rectangle on a PC's desktop to select multiple icons), then let go when a rat walks into the trap area. The player then has to head for a special floor switch called the Destructor, where they can dispose of the long-tailed losers. The rats damage you if they hit you, and with each subsequent stage the number of rats increases, so the game eventually becomes a juggling act between capturing as many rats as possible while trying to avoid them hitting you at the same time. As if that isn't enough, each stage has some items the rats want to destroy: if they manage this before you catch them all, you lose. ■

FACT

A making-off blog on the game's official website promised players that their CD loading code was so fast, players wouldn't 'ever see the dreaded LOADING screen' in the PlayStation version. They did.

RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE

Year	1999
Publisher	Ubisoft
Developer	Ubi Pictures



RELEASED IN 1995, the original Rayman was such a surprisingly overwhelming success for Ubisoft that a sequel was always going to happen at some point. Rayman 2 initially began life as a 2D side-scroller that looked very similar to its predecessor, until Ubisoft decided to ditch the idea and jump straight into the world of 3D.

The game is set in the Glade of Dreams, which has been invaded and occupied by a group of evil robot pirates from space led by the downright nasty Admiral Razorbeard. Usually plots like this then go 'and so the hero decided to head out and save the day', but by the time we join Rayman at the start of this adventure, he's already tried that and failed spectacularly. Captured and held captive on a prison ship called the *Buccaneer*, Rayman and his friend Globox appear to be out of ideas until Globox gives Raymond a silver Lum, a special glowing blob of energy that gives him some of his powers back. Escaping from the ship, Rayman decides that the first thing he should do is find Ly, a fairy who has the ability to help Rayman but whose powers have been weakened by the robot pirates' invasion. NOW the hero can head out and save the day.

Rayman 2 is your standard 3D platformer, in which Rayman has to make his way through a series of stages fighting against any robo pirates he comes across. As he does this he has to collect more Lums, in particular the yellow ones. There are 1,000 yellow Lums scattered around the world, and the more Rayman collects the more information they share with him. More importantly, yellow Lums are also used to unlock access to stages that were previously locked off, similar to the musical notes in Banjo-Kazooie. At first Rayman can only fire small energy bolts from his hands and spin his hair like a helicopter's rotors to glide slowly to the ground during jumps, but as the player progresses through the game they'll find more silver Lums which give him new abilities.

FACT

A cover of Mel Brooks' song *It's Good to be the King* with the lyrics changed to describe Rayman was released by French dance duo Royal V (me neither). The CD included a demo for the PC version of Rayman 2.

On paper Rayman 2 doesn't do anything particularly spectacular, but it was the general high level of competence in every aspect of the game that made it such a popular title among critics and players alike. Although it began life on the N64, it's a testament to the game's popularity that it was ported to countless other systems in the years that followed, including the likes of the Dreamcast, the PS2 and even the DS and 3DS. Super Mario 64 and Banjo-Kazooie may be the games many cite as the pinnacles of platforming on the Nintendo 64, but Rayman 2 was the perfect example of a title that was just solid in every way and delivered a great adventure as a result. As for that 2D platformer prototype? Well, it can be unlocked in the PlayStation version of Rayman 2. ■

RAZOR FREESTYLE SCOOTER

Year 2001
Publisher Crave Entertainment
Developer Titanium Studios

THE NATURE OF the video game industry means that any time an original title becomes a huge success, its imitators will surely follow. That was certainly the case with Tony Hawk's Pro Skater and its sequels, which spawned plenty of copycat releases attempting to make some bank off their triumph. While the majority of these were released during the PS2, Xbox and GameCube generation, one or two were knocked out quickly enough to appear during the previous gen, with Razor Freestyle Scooter being a prime example of this. Featuring the official licence of scooter company Razor USA (which had just been founded the previous year), the game has a bizarre story about a badly programmed robot called Norton which has captured the Razor Crew, a group of scooter pros. Playing as one of two kids called Chad and Amy, you have to take on a series of Tony Hawk-style challenges – get a high score, grind a total distance, rack up a set combo score, that sort of thing – to unlock bonus stages, which in turn unlock other members of the Razor Crew. The game plays remarkably similarly to Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, even using the N64 version's unique C button control system. While it only offered three main stages (a scooter park, a school and a clock tower), by completing certain tasks players could unlock a further six secret levels. As far as Tony Hawk knock-offs (Hawk-offs, if you will) are concerned, there were worse. ■

FACT

Bizarrely, one of the unlockable characters (and therefore an apparent member of the Razor Crew) is UFC fighter Tito Ortiz.

RE-VOLT

Year 1999
Publisher Acclaim Entertainment
Developer Acclaim Studios London

RE-VOLT IS WHAT you would get if you took the standard Mario Kart concept and applied it to RC cars instead. That should be all the description you need but for some reason the game also has a plot. Toy-Volt is a company that's been making magic toys, but it's overdone it with its latest line of radio-controlled cars. The cars have a mind of their own and have escaped from the shelves that were holding them prisoner, and are now out there in the world. Thankfully, instead of attempting to take over the planet or anything like that, they've just decided to have a little race, which is where you come in. After selecting your RC car of choice you then take part in a series of races across such environments as a neighbourhood, a supermarket, a botanical garden, a ghost town, a Museum and a toy-themed area. The game has its standard Single Race, Championship and Time Trial modes but there's also a mode called Stunt Arena where you're placed in a special map with 20 stars hiding in it. If you can collect all 20 you'll unlock another unique mode called Clockwork Carnage in which the RC cars are replaced with wind-up cars in a ridiculous 30-car race. Because you're racing RC cars, the handling is extremely light and the slightest contact with a kerb or other obstacle can send you flying. This split opinion on Re-Volt, although the majority of players enjoyed its quirky take on what had become an established genre by that point. ■

FACT

The original Xbox was set to get a port of Re-Volt with online multiplayer. Beta users of Xbox Live were able to test it out, but it was never properly released.

READY 2 RUMBLE BOXING

Year 1999
Publisher Midway
Developer Midway San Diego / Point of View

BOXING GAMES CAN go in one of two ways. They can either aim for hyper-realism and offer a deep, technical simulation of the sport, or they can go in the completely opposite direction and go for an all-out action game with boxers punching lumps out of each other with very little tactical planning. Ready 2 Rumble Boxing leans very heavily towards the latter of these styles, offering an arcade-style punchfest with over-the-top action and an even more ridiculous character roster. There are 17 boxers in the game, ranging from retired New York cab driver Afro Thunder (who sports one of the largest afro hairdos you'll ever see in a video game), to enormous Croatian heavyweight Boris 'The Bear' Knockemov. And, just in case it wasn't clear that this is a game that doesn't take itself too seriously, one of the fighters – a pale chap called 'Big' Willy Johnson who sports a handlebar moustache – is actually an English pugilist from the 1800s who's arrived through a rift in time and has a special move called 'tea and crumpets'. The game's title is a reference to the famous 'let's get ready to rumble' slogan created by famous boxing announcer Michael Buffer, and sure enough a fully licensed version of Buffer himself appears at the start of each fight, to bellow his catchphrase before the chaos ensues. Although it was the Dreamcast version that gained the most headlines, the N64 port is solid enough. ■

FACT

The game's Brazilian boxer Selene Strike was modelled after Mylah, the wife of lead artist and co-designer Emmanual Valdez.

READY 2 RUMBLE BOXING: ROUND 2

Year 2000
Publisher Midway
Developer Point of View

CLEARLY DECIDING THAT it shouldn't try to fix what wasn't broken, Midway's sequel to Ready 2 Rumble plays almost identically to its predecessor, with the only major change to gameplay being the way the game's Rumble meter works. In the first game, landing enough key hits on your opponent would build up the word RUMBLE. When it was fully spelled out, it could then be triggered to activate a more powerful flurry of punches. This time the Rumble meter can be filled up three times before triggering it, leading to more powerful attacks with each upgrade. Indeed, if you can fill it up three times before activating it, you can punch your opponent clean out of the ring for an instant win. The main selling point for Round 2 was the introduction of some celebrity fighters, some of whom were officially approved and others… well. The celebs who gave the nod to appear in the game are Shaquille O'Neal and Michael Jackson, who both provided voice samples (though many of these samples are missing from the N64 version). Perhaps more controversially, the game also includes Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton as parody characters named Mr President and The First Lady respectively. At the time, it was a fun marketing pitch to gain some column inches in the press, but one would imagine that a game in which you punch Hillary Clinton's face until it's a bruised mess probably wouldn't go down so well in this day and age. ■

FACT

Jackson reportedly called Midway personally and asked to be in the game because he loved the original so much, and refused to be paid for his appearance.

RESIDENT EVIL 2

Year 1999
Publisher Capcom / Virgin Interactive
Developer Capcom / Angel Studios / Factor 5

THERE HAVE BEEN numerous cases over the years of so-called 'impossible ports': games that have been released on systems that were seemingly incapable of accurately recreating them. Resident Evil 2, the first appearance of Capcom's hugely popular survival horror series on a Nintendo platform, is perhaps the ultimate impossible port. But we'll get to that.

Set two months after the events of the first Resident Evil, the notorious T-Virus has spread to Raccoon City and transformed all of its citizens into flesh-eating zombies (it's turned the residents evil, if you will). At the same time as rookie cop Leon S. Kennedy arrives at Raccoon City for what he thinks is his first day at work, college student Claire Redfield turns up looking for her brother Chris (from the first game). The pair become acquainted but are quickly separated by a huge explosion, so they agree to go their separate ways and meet up later. Players can choose to play as either Leon or Claire and explore the Raccoon City Police Department and numerous other locations as they try to put an end to… whatever the hell it is that's going on.

Resident Evil 2 was released on the PlayStation in 1998, and came on two CDs, each holding 700 MB of storage. Despite this, a 10-person team at Angel Studios (who would later become Rockstar San Diego) worked with Capcom to somehow take the full game and squeeze it, in its entirety, onto a cartridge with a mere 64 MB capacity. In some areas, the game has obviously been downgraded as a result of this: the biggest victim (other than the people getting their throats ripped out in the game, of course) are the FMV cutscenes peppered throughout the game. These were heavily compressed with a reduced frame yet but are still in there and are still perfectly watchable.

FACT

The FMV scenes were reduced from 30 frames per second to 15, and Angel Studios used interpolation to 'fill in' the gaps. Although the result was noticeably different from the PS1, it was still good enough to get the job done.

Amazingly, despite the cutbacks in some areas, the game is actually better than the PlayStation version in many other ways. The music was resampled and plays at a higher quality, Dolby Surround was added, and if players used an Expansion Pak they could play at a higher 640x480 resolution. The game also has a Randomiser mode, which places certain items in different areas every time you play the game, and also adds an optional separate control scheme which ditches the 'love them or hate them' tank-like controls for a more straightforward 'they go where you move the stick' style. As if all that wasn't enough, an extra 16 in-game text documents (referred to as the Ex Files) were added to the N64 version, adding some extra lore to the series and preparing players for Resident Evil 3.

The Nintendo 64 version of Resident Evil 2 will go down in history as one of the most incredible technical accomplishments achieved by a development studio. To cut down the original game to less than a tenth of the size and still deliver something that is actually better in some ways was nothing short of a masterclass in porting. ■

RIDGE RACER 64

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo Software Technology

THERE WERE FEW arcade racing games as iconic and ground-breaking as Ridge Racer. When Namco's racing series first debuted in arcades in late 1993, it was the first arcade game to feature texture mapped polygonal graphics, making it one of the most realistic looking games ever created. It became a permanent fixture in arcades all over the world and was ported to the PlayStation as a launch title, delivering one of the earliest blows to Sega's Saturn with its less impressive Daytona USA port.

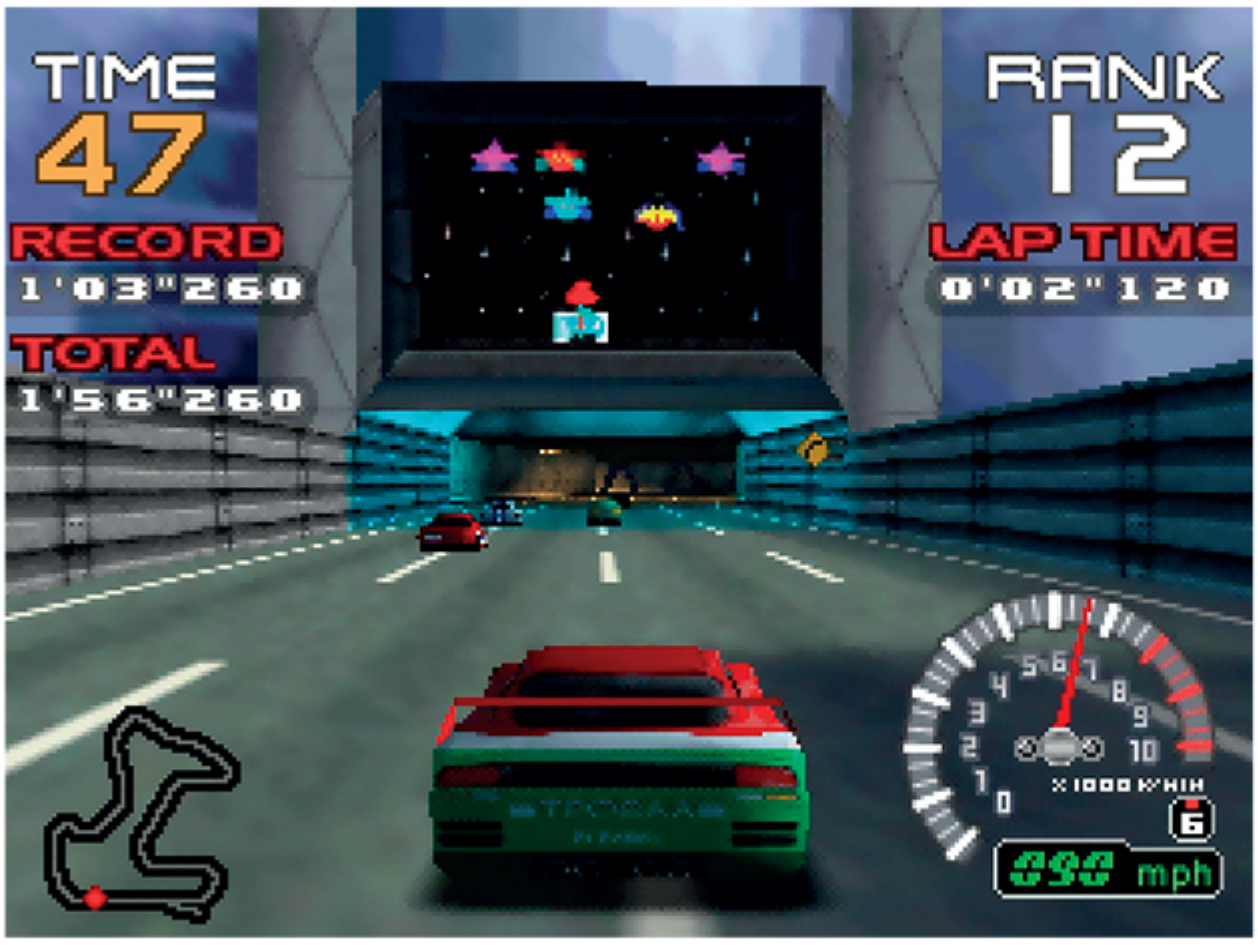
Namco managed to fire out seven separate Ridge Racer games in arcades and on consoles before it finally got around to Ridge Racer 64. While seven games in that space of time was a feat, releasing on the N64 was something of a feat in itself because up to that point the series was firmly associated with PlayStation. Instead, for this game, Namco handed the keys over to Nintendo's US-based NST studio, who created their own version of the game with Namco's assistance. The game is a sort of 'best of' Ridge Racer, featuring a total of 10 courses that take place over four different environments. The first of these environments is the original track from the first Ridge Racer, while the second comes from its PlayStation sequel Ridge Racer Revolution. The third is a mountain course exclusive to the Nintendo 64, then eventually players can unlock a final night stage based on the series' fictional Ridge City.

FACT

Ridge Racer 64 was later re-released as an early Nintendo DS title called Ridge Racer DS. While the game was mostly the same, some of its bonus cars were replaced with Mario-themed vehicles.

Initially there are only four cars to choose from, but over time the player can unlock a healthy total of 32 vehicles and, in classic Ridge Racer style, many of them have sponsors, name-checking classic Namco games like Mappy, Xevious, Galaga and Pac-Man. Beating the game on its hardest Z-Class category unlocks the Ultra 64 car – the most powerful vehicle in the game – while on the other side of the scale players can also unlock a golf cart, so it's fair to say the vehicles vary quite a bit in terms of power. One of the most important things for fans of the Ridge Racer series is the way each game handles drifting around corners, which is why Ridge Racer 64 not only attempts to put its own spin on how its cars control, but also offers players the option to use Ridge Racer or Ridge Racer Revolution style drift systems and collision systems if that's what they're more used to.

Ultimately, Ridge Racer 64 may have arrived a little too late in the series' lifespan, because Namco had already released the incredible Ridge Racer Type 4 on PlayStation two years earlier. This offered significantly more courses and over 300 vehicles, making it a much bigger game. Had it never been released, Ridge Racer. 64 would potentially have been considered the highest point in the series to date, but instead inevitable comparisons were made with Type 4 and in those cases the game on Sony's console always won out. ■



ROAD RASH 64

Year	1999
Publisher	THQ
Developer	Pacific Coast Power & Light

MANY PLAYERS WHO owned a Mega Drive or Genesis during the early '90s will be intimately familiar (not like that) with the Road Rash series, EA's collection of mirthsome motorbike melee games. The brand would continue for a while beyond the 16-bit area, with a total of six games released before it finally hit the dusty trail. Road Rash 64 was the fifth of these games, and the only one released by THQ instead of EA.

Much like the games that came before it, Road Rash 64's main aim is to race your motorbike down a variety of American roads alongside a bunch of other bikers, in an attempt to finish in first place. That alone doesn't really separate it from many other racing games, but where Road Rash differs is in its use of combat to separate the men from the… other men that don't hit people. Players can perform punches, backhand slaps and kicks in an attempt to knock opponents off their bikes. If that isn't violent enough, you can even get your hands on a weapon to do even more damage, as you batter your fellow racers with clubs and chains. Naturally, such shenanigans don't go down too well with local law enforcement, meaning at times you'll also have to deal with cops who show up on their own bikes trying to break up the race, all while you're trying to avoid traffic at the same time. The whole thing is anarchy when it works properly, and it certainly did in this Nintendo 64 rendition.

Unlike most other games in the series, the N64's take on Road Rash offers fully polygonal characters and environments. This led to a rather simplistic art style, not just because polygons were generally less detailed than sprites, but also because the sheer number of racers that could appear on screen at any time forced the developers to reduce the level of detail for each racer. The result of this is a game that runs smoothly, though, which is more important in something as fast-paced as Road Rash.

The game has two main single-player modes. Thrash is an arcade-style mode where you choose from a series of races and try to finish well in each of them, while The Big Game is a much larger mode, where you race through a preset list of courses, eventually covering what THQ claims is 300 square kilometres of track (though why it's listed as square kilometres even though it isn't open world is beyond me). Do well enough in these modes and you can also unlock a hidden Cop mode where the tables are turned and you become a police officer, with the aim being to knock everyone of their bikes before you crash yourself. If you've got friends along for the ride, you can also take part in a variety of multiplayer games, including standard races, deathmatches and the oddly named Ped Hunt, which has you trying to run over as many pedestrians as you can. ■

FACT

The last (physical) Road Rash game was a 2003 Game Boy Advance port of PlayStation title Road Rash Jailbreak. There was also a Java mobile game released in 2009 but that isn't really counted in the main series.

ROADSTERS

Year 1999
Publisher Titus Software
Developer Titus Interactive

ALTHOUGH TITUS HAD developed something of a reputation for producing less than stellar games on the Nintendo 64 (see Superman 64 and Blues Brothers 2000), the French publisher and developer still had a very different reputation among other circles for producing a number of high-quality racing games, especially during the 16 bit era. The Crazy Cars trilogy on the Amiga and their SNES successor Lamborghini American Challenge were critically acclaimed, and Automobili Lamborghini on the N64 had its fans too. Roadsters is the natural progression of those games and features 34 cars, although only 12 of them are officially licensed by the likes of Renault, Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Lotus, Toyota and TVR. The rest are all still based on real cars, but their model and manufacturer are fictional: the Borato Millennium, for example, is just a Honda S2000, while the Exeter Hotrod is actually a Plymouth Prowler. Other than the ability to select between eight characters, who can be seen behind the wheel in-game and have little soundbites, the game doesn't really do anything else that's drastically unique: the main mode is a straightforward Roadster Trophy mode, where players start at the bottom division and work their way up the rankings by winning races and using the prize money to buy and upgrade their cars. But what it lacks in creativity, it makes up for with solid racing action. The game was met with a middling response when it was originally released, which means it can be found fairly cheap these days. ■

FACT

The term 'roadsters' used to mean two-seat cars with no weather protection, but these days generally includes two-seater convertibles too. Either way, the game is realistic because it would be ruined if left out in the rain too.

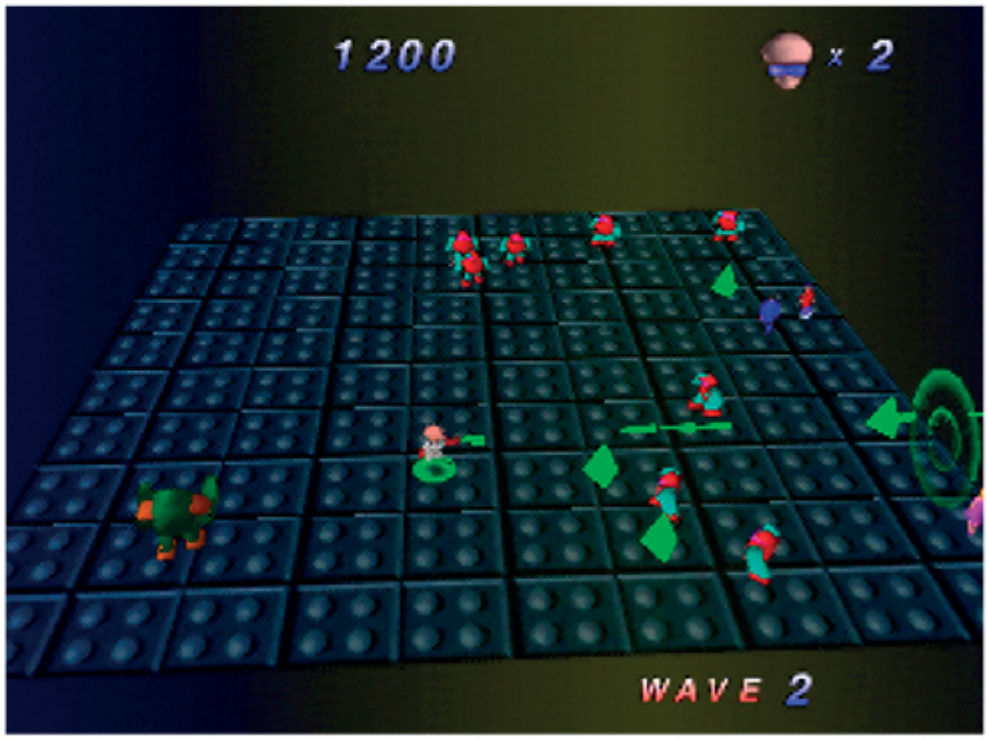
ROBOTRON 64

Year 1998
Publisher Crave Entertainment / GT Interactive
Developer Player 1

EUGENE JARVIS'S 1982 arcade game Robotron 2084 was a ground-breaking release that heralded the birth of twin-stick shooting games. Its huge success led to a number of other classic twin-stick shooters, some of which – including Smash TV and Total Carnage – were designed by Jarvis himself. In 1996, Midway attempted to modernise the game with the PlayStation title Robotron X, which was criticised for having a wild camera that made it hard to aim. Robotron 64 is a port of Robotron X which fixes many of the PlayStation game's issues, making it a far more entertaining release. The game remains a twin-shooter where the aim is to destroy evil robots while rescuing the humans who are roaming around in each stage. Since the N64 controller only had one stick, the default controls have players moving with the Control Stick and aiming their shots with the four C buttons like a makeshift D-Pad. Anyone craving a bit more accuracy, however, could actually plug in two controllers and use each of their Control Sticks for legit twin-stick shooting action. Robotron 64 may not have had the same impact as its predecessor, which is understandable, but for fans of Jarvis's iconic game this was a reasonable update with 200 levels to play through. While it certainly succeeds in looking more attractive than the '80s original, though, the ultimate lesson it delivered was that a game doesn't have to play differently to still have an impact more than 15 years later. ■

FACT

Midway told IGN in 1997 that the N64 version of Robotron X was 'dead in the water'. Later that year, the game was picked up by Crave Entertainment, which was a new publisher at the time.



ROCKET: ROBOT ON WHEELS

Year	1999
Publisher	Ubisoft
Developer	Sucker Punch Productions

THESE DAYS, SUCKER Punch Productions is very much a Playstation studio. Acquired by Sony in 2011, the Washington-based developer has been responsible for a range of PlayStation hits including the likes of Ghost of Tsushima, Sly Cooper and Infamous. Back when it was first founded in 1997, however, Sucker Punch's first hit was actually a Nintendo 64 game. Well, I say 'hit' but it's not like Rocket: Robot on Wheels was one of the console's best-selling games. Despite this, however, Rocket is rightly regarded by some as one of the best hidden gems on the N64, and one of a handful of 3D platformers on the system that still hold up remarkably well to this date.

The game tells the story of the titular Rocket, a lovable robot who works at the control centre for a new intergalactic theme park called Whoopie World. Throughout his construction Rocket has longed to go and visit the park itself, but his creator Dr Gavin (who also created the park, because he's clearly some sort of brainbox) has always insisted that Rocket has to stay in the control centre to make sure everything's running smoothly. There's just one problem, however: the park's mascot Whoopie the walrus has a sidekick raccoon called Jojo, who doesn't fancy being second fiddle. The night before the park opens, Rocket discovers that Jojo plans to ruin the opening day in the hope that the park will be rebranded Jojo World. Realising he's been rumbled, Jojo knocks out Rocket, kidnaps Whoopie and escapes to the park. Rocket decides that instead of bothering Dr Gavin, he'll teleport down to the park as well to try to stop Jojo and rescue Whoopie in time for the gates opening the next day.

FACT

Nintendo, Sony and EA all turned down Sucker Punch when approached to publish the game. It wasn't until the team showed it off independently at E3 that Ubisoft noticed it and offered to publish it.

In a sense, Rocket: Robot on Wheels has a similar structure to the likes of Super Mario 64 and Banjo-Kazooie in that the the game has a main hub area, which is connected to a group of smaller worlds: six in this case, each representing a different themed area of Whoopie World. Each world also has 12 tickets which, like the stars in Super Mario 64, can be collected by performing a series of different tasks and mini-games (many of which involved physics-based problems, a novelty at the time). Players need to collect a certain number of tickets to open access to each world, meaning exploration is the key to progression. Rocket can also collect tokens, of which there are 200 in each world. These can be given to a special robot called Tinker, who can build new abilities for Rocket: as is video game law, these enable him to travel back to previously inaccessible areas and gain entry to them. Rocket is a charming game that won over most of the players who gave it a chance. While it didn't become the household name that Sucker Punch may have hoped it would be, it nevertheless established the studio as one capable of producing quality, a reputation that has remained over the years. ■

RUGRATS IN PARIS: THE MOVIE

Year 2000
Publisher THQ
Developer Avalanche Software

BASED ON THE Nickelodeon animated movie of the same name, Rugrats in Paris sees everyone's favourite preschooler pals travelling to France. Tommy's dad Stu has been called to Euro Reptar Land (which definitely has nothing to do with Euro Disney, honest Mr Lawyer) to fix a faulty robot, but of course, as is the Rugrats' way, the toddlers end up going off on their own adventure. A supposedly nasty creature called Robosnail has kidnapped a princess, and the kids think their Godzilla-like monster hero Reptar can rescue her. Reptar has a mind of his own, though, so how to convince him to help out? Simple: the park has a prize booth which includes a Reptar Helmet, which the kids believe can be used to control his mind. All they have to do is find enough of the prize tickets dotted around the park to be able to aford the helmet. The aim, then, is to explore an oddly empty theme park as one of six kids – Chuckie, Tommy, Angelica, Phil, Lil or their new friend Kimi – and take on its various mini-games to earn tickets. The game offers support for up to four players, but despite the fact that some of the mini-games (like bumper cars and mini golf) seem perfectly suited for multiplayer action, and despite the fact that the box claims you can 'bump your buddies', in reality players can't play together simultaneously and instead have to take turns. ■

FACT

The film has a questionable scene in which sumo wrestlers sing karaoke with Angelica. Two of the sumo wrestlers were voiced by Tim Curry and Billy West (Fry from Futurama).

RUGRATS SCAVENGER HUNT

Year 1999
Publisher THQ
Developer Realtime Associates

COME ON, NOW. You didn't seriously expect Mario Party to come and go without other companies trying to get involved in the action, did you? Rugrats Scavenger Hunt is exactly that: a board game that bears more than a passing resemblance to Nintendo's series, except with characters from Nickelodeon's cartoon replacing Mario and the gang (I suppose Reptar looks a bit like Bowser if you squint a bit). Players can choose between four characters – Tommy, Chuckie, Phil and Lil – and have three different boards they can play on. Angelica's Temple of Gloom is an Aztec-themed board, and the only co-op board in the game: all four players have to work together to collect a set number of broken statue pieces before Angelica (who's also roaming the board) manages to collect hers. Pirate Treasure Hunt, meanwhile, is set underwater and has the babies competing against each other to find the most hidden treasure so they can become Angelica's first mate. Finally, Reptar Rally is a shorter game where the babies – who look like little mini dinosaurs – visit Reptar on his candy island and have to collect as many sweets as possible. In typical board game fashion, each of the squares on the boards have different effects: some, for example, give you cookies, which are the game's currency. There is one element that doesn't bear resemblance to the Mario Party games, however: this is pure board game action, with no mini-games in sight. ■

FACT

A total of 172 episodes of *Rugrats* were created, making it Nickelodeon's longest-running show until *SpongeBob SquarePants* overtook it in 2012.

RUSH 2: EXTREME RACING USA

Year 1998
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Atari Games

ORIGINALLY PLANNED TO be released on multiple formats, the sequel to San Francisco Rush (see later) ultimately ended up being exclusive to the Nintendo 64 when the other versions were ditched. Whereas the original game's tracks were all set in San Francisco (hence the name), here the seven main courses are all located in different places around the entire United States. This time players find themselves racing through Alcatraz, Hawaii, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Seattle, and two New York tracks: one uptown, one downtown. There are also some slightly odder tracks that can be unlocked, including one that takes place in a giant skateboard half pipe and a particularly inventive circuit in which all the cars have been shrunk down to a tiny size and are racing around the Midway office building. There are a wide range of vehicles to choose from, ranging from conventional types (such as a muscle car, a sportster and a 4x4) to slightly less traditional racing fare (like a van or a pickup truck). All these new additions aside, the general gameplay still remains the same as that of its predecessor, meaning players can still expect to indulge in ridiculous over-the-top jumps, while overdoing it and crashing into walls still leads to their car exploding in a ball of flames. As it's generally considered more of the same, those who enjoy the original San Francisco Rush will get a similar kick out of this America-wide sequel. ■

FACT

The game has a tie-in with Mountain Dew, and each stage has Mountain Dew cans hidden in it. If you can collect four cans in one race, you'll unlock a Mountain Dew themed car.

S.C.A.R.S.

Year 1998
Publisher Ubisoft
Developer Vivid Image

IF YOU'VE SEEN one karting game, you've seen them all. Or have you? How many karting games have you seen where all the cars are based on giant mechanical animals? Yup, that's what I thought. S.C.A.R.S. is set in the year 3000, where humans no longer have control over the world and it's instead run by nine special supercomputers each boasting a level of intelligence we can only dream of. It turns out being in charge of the entire world can be quite a boring affair, however, so to entertain themselves the super computers create a new pastime by building their own deadly vehicles based on the world's most dangerous animals and racing them against each other. Choosing from one of these nine beast-based buggies – be that lion, mammoth, rhino, tiger shark, mantis, cheetah, panther, cobra or scorpion – the player's aim is simply to win four different cups, each consisting of kart-style racing that's a lot more conventional than the car designs are. Naturally, there are weapons to be found too, but some of them are a little more inventive than usual: take the boomerang, which continually circles around your car until you get close to an opponent, at which point it flies out, smacks them and returns to you. Meanwhile, the magnet plants itself on the track and sits there, waiting for a car to drive past, at which point it pulls them over and holds them in place. ■

FACT

Although it's never mentioned in the game, according to an interview at the time S.C.A.R.S. stands for Situational Computer-generated Animal Racing Simulation.

SAN FRANCISCO RUSH: EXTREME RACING

Year	1997
Publisher	Midway / GT Interactive
Developer	Midway Games

SAN FRANCISCO FEELS like a city that was built for racing. It's the reason why so many movies in the twentieth century featured car chases in San Francisco, and the reason why it regularly appeared in racing games of the same era including Driver: San Francisco, Super Runabout: San Francisco Edition and even Sega's Crazy Taxi (whose city is clearly supposed to be San Fran in all but name). Its healthy selection of large steep hills is probably one of the main reasons for this, and it's also potentially the key ingredient that inspired Atari Games to release San Francisco Rush in arcades in 1996.

In one sense, it's your typical arcade racer, in that you choose from a selection of cars and try to finish first ahead of your opponents: this isn't a game that tries to reinvent the wheel. What it does do, however, is try to make sure those wheels aren't always on the road, thanks to the ridiculously dramatic jumps that pop up with alarming regularity. Because of those hills that make up the city, there are numerous moments where players find themselves flying through the air for inordinate periods, leading to the sort of exhilarating moments that are perfectly suited to coin-op racing.

The original arcade version only released with three tracks, but the Nintendo 64 port added a further three to offer the player better value for money. All six tracks take in a variety of San Francisco landmarks, with players racing past the likes of the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco Bay, the Bank of America Building and Chinatown (thankfully, the manual provides labelled maps in case you can't tell the big polygonal buildings apart). Atari decided to send this new six-track version of the game back to arcades as an upgrade called San Francisco Rush: The Rock, along with a seventh track set on Alcatraz. This seventh track was actually in the N64 game too, but Atari wanted to give players a reason to turn up to the arcades to play the updated release.

FACT

Some players managed to find the Alcatraz track early by using a Gameshark cheat cartridge. In an interview with *IGN* at the time, project leader Ed Logg succinctly described Midway's reaction as 'Oh shit'.

To get around this, Midway offered to hide the Alacatraz course with an obscenely elaborate cheat code, which would be revealed six months after release to give players a chance to play it in arcades first. Incidentally, they weren't kidding: the code is easily one of the most ridiculous processes required to unlock anything in a game, with four separate convoluted button combinations needed to be entered on four different screens. San Francisco Rush would be praised for its hugely entertaining racing action, and the N64 port in particular was praised for being a faithful recreation (albeit a visually inferior one, naturally). ■

SAN FRANCISCO RUSH 2049

Year 2000
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Midway Games

WHAT DO YOU do when you've released a racing game with tracks set in San Francisco, then followed that up with another in which the tracks are set across the US? You do one with track sets all over the world next, don't you? Don't be so ridiculous: you do San Francisco again but 50 years in the future, everybody knows that. That's the premise of Rush 2049, which dumps players in a futuristic rendition of San Francisco, which it turns out looks a bit like normal San Francisco but with more lights and ramps. The game leans heavily on the comically high jumps that featured in the previous games, and builds on them by adding even more over-the-top leaps. What's more, this time players' cars are armed with a set of wings which can be extended any time the car is in mid-air. These allow the player to use the Control Stick to turn the car, allowing for all series of ridiculous spins and flips (though naturally you have to try and centre the car before it lands, otherwise carnage is inevitable). As well as the six standard race tracks available there are a number of stunt arenas – where those wings really come into play as you rack up points for elaborate mid-air tricks – as well as a series of battle arenas, where up to four players can pick up weapons like Gatling guns, plasma cannons, and rocket launchers and take each other out. ■

FACT

The North American version of the game simply calls its courses Track 1, Track 2, etc. The European version has unique names for each track, like Marina, Civic and Metro.

SCOOBY-DOO! CLASSIC CREEP CAPERS

Year 2000
Publisher THQ
Developer Terraglyph Interactive Studios

THE OLD HANNA Barbera series *Scooby-Doo: Where Are You?* is a timeless piece of entertainment: at least, that's what publisher THQ must have decided when it released Scooby-Doo! Classic Creep Capers, a point-and-click style adventure which was exclusive to the Nintendo 64. The game retells the story of three vintage Scooby-Doo cartoons: What a Night for a Knight (which was originally broadcast in 1969), That's Snow Ghost (1970) and A Tiki Scare is No Fair (also 1970). Players control Shaggy – accompanied by Scoob, naturally – as he explores various locations in search for clues as the Scooby Gang attempt to discover the identities of the Black Knight, the Snow Ghost and the Witch Doctor. Shaggy has a fear meter which fills up as scary things happen to him, so the player has to not only solve puzzles but also keep an eye on how well he's holding it together, topping up his meter with food or Scooby Snacks as needed. Since each episode sticks to the plot of the original cartoons (right down to some of the puzzles, such as hiding in a painting to avoid a mummy), Scooby-Doo die-hards will already know what's going to happen, but they can't stay smug the entire time: once players make their way through all three episodes, there's a final fourth episode called The Case of the Classic Creeps, which is completely unique to this game and has an entirely new storyline. Figure that one out, nerds. ■

FACT

The developers said at the time that the biggest challenge making the game was coming up with a game that had monsters in it but didn't allow the player to fight back, because that wasn't what Scooby and Shaggy were known for doing.

SHADOW MAN

Year 1998
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Acclaim Studios Teesside

ALRIGHT, BUCKLE UP because this one has a story that really goes places. Michael LeRoi is the Shadow Man, a voodoo warrior who protects the world of the living (also known as Liveside) from any unwanted invasions by evil forces crossing over from the world of the dead (or Deadside, as the cool kids call it). Shadow Man learns that someone called Legion is planning to kick off the apocalypse by claiming the immortal souls of damned warriors known as the Dark Souls (not that one) and using them to create an immortal army. To stop him, Shadow Man has to first find and stop the Five, a group of serial killers who live in Liveside. The problem is, the Five can only be harmed by Shadow Man's powers, but he can only use them in Darkside: in Lightside he's just normal old Michael LeRoi, so he has to figure out a way to bring those powers to the world of the living. On top of all that, there's also a giant Irish snake called Jaunty who has a skull for a face. Oh, and Michael travels between Liveside and Deadside via portals created by his dead brother's teddy bear. And Jack the Ripper's involved in some way too. It goes without saying that Shadow Man's plot is the most notable thing about the game, but that's not to belittle the gameplay: the story aside, it's still a solid 3D action-adventure title, which explains the cult following the game has and absolutely deserves. ■

FACT

Shadow Man Remastered was released for the PC in 2021 and included support for 4K graphics and HDR, as well as improved AI, physics, lighting and controls.

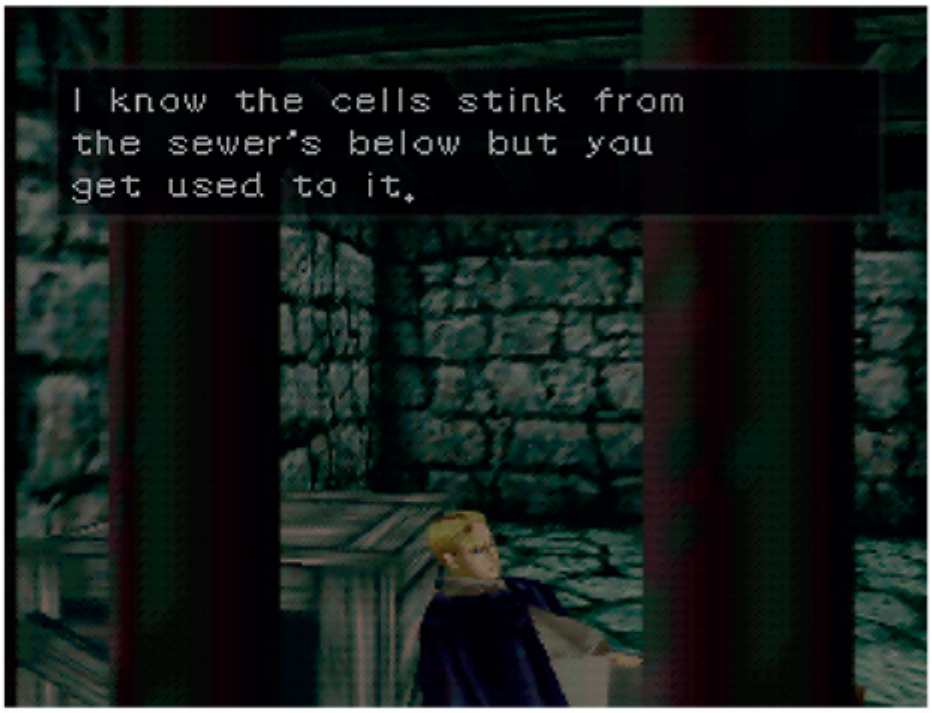
SHADOWGATE 64: TRIALS OF THE FOUR TOWERS

Year 1999
Publisher Kemco
Developer TNS / Infinite Ventures

THE ORIGINAL SHADOWGATE was a critically acclaimed first-person point-and-click adventure (which you can find out more about in the *NES Encyclopedia*, wink). The original developer, Icon, released a sequel for the TurboGrafx in 1993, then shortly afterwards the rights to Shadowgate were acquired by a developer called Infinite Ventures, which set about releasing its own sequel, a Nintendo 64 exclusive called Trials of the Four Towers. Although it's technically a sequel to the original game, the fact it takes place hundreds of years later means players don't really need to be fully aware of the lore. You take on the role of Del Cottonwood, a halfling whose caravan is ambushed by a group of bandits while he's trying to cross Shadowgate. Del has to escape from his cell then get out of Castle Shadowgate by passing through its four deadly towers (and taking on the trials within, as you've no doubt guessed by the title). Like its predecessor, Shadowgate 64 is a first-person adventure where the focus is less on fighting – indeed, you can't fight at all and have to avoid enemies – and more on solving puzzles. While the game did receive praise at the time for its storyline, some raised issue with the way that players can instantly die in numerous situations, including an infamous one right at the start of the game in which, as soon as you escape from your cell, you can fall into a deep pit of water and drown, forcing you to start again. ■

FACT

A sequel called Shadowgate Rising was planned for the N64, and was going to take place centuries after Shadowgate 64. A few early screenshots were released but the game was cancelled.



SNOWBOARD KIDS

Year	1997
Publisher	Atlus
Developer	Racdym

WHAT DO YOU get when you cross the downhill alpine racing delights of 1080° Snowboarding with the weapons-based shenanigans of the Mario Kart series? If your answer is Shadowgate, you've overshot the mark a bit, and should be on the previous page. The actual answer, of course, is Snowboard Kids, a thoroughly entertaining snowboarding action game which feels like a perfect mashup of Nintendo's aforementioned racing IPs.

The game's roster consists of five elementary school children (a sixth can be unlocked later), all of whom live in a small town in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Given where they live the kids are obviously keen snowboarders, and during a particularly heated lunchtime chat all five decide to declare themselves the best snowboarders in town. A competition is promptly set up and the five prepare to find out who is truly the best of the Snowboard Kids (or Snobow Kids, as the game is known in Japan). At first there are six courses to race through: Rookie Mountain, Big Snowman, Sunset Rock, Night Highway, Grass Valley and Dizzy Land (the latter of which is a theme park based on dinosaurs, because why not). Do well in each of these races and you'll unlock three special ones: Quicksand Valley (which replaces the snow with sand) Silver Mountain (which is covered in fog) and Ninja Land (where you take on Shinobin, the hidden sixth character).

FACT

Developer Racdym changed its name to Racjin in 2000 to make it easier to pronounce. In 2020 it helped with development on Paper Mario: Origami King on the Switch.

One of the more interesting elements of Snowboard Kids is the way the game handles power-ups. Instead of simply collecting them by racing over them as is the case in Mario Kart games, you instead have to earn them by collecting coins that appear on the course. You'll occasionally come across blue and red stalls on the snow: blue stalls contain items, while red stalls contain weapons. If you have enough money, driving through these will let you 'buy' the power-up, and if you don't you'll crash into the stall and tumble onto your backside.

Given that it's essentially a karting game rather than a straightforward snowboarding one, a potential issue the game faces was how to handle laps: after all, the whole thing is just a series of continually downhill races. This is handily sorted with the inclusion of chairlifts, meaning when players get to the bottom of the mountain they then have to find and get on the chairlift to get carried up to the start again. This adds an extra level of chaos to proceedings as players can sometimes be found fighting at the bottom of the hill to reach the chairlift first. Snowboard Kids is ultimately one of the better racing games on the Nintendo 64 but it always hovered just slightly under well-known territory, meaning a lot of players may still not be aware of it. If it's one that passed you by and you're reading about it for the first time, it's certainly worth a look. ■

SNOWBOARD KIDS 2

Year	1999
Publisher	Atlus
Developer	Racdym

SNOWBOARD KIDS WAS clearly popular enough to justify a sequel, so Atlus and Racdym followed it up with the cleverly named Snowboard Kids 2. This time the kids are startled to learn that a UFO has landed in their town, but it turns out it's not an alien at all: it's the work of Wendy, a 10-year-old brainiac who's just moved to the town from New York. Somehow abandoning the UFO altogether (how's that for a red herring), the gang decide to give Wendy an initiation by having another contest, albeit a more light-hearted one than the previous grudge match. Not all is as it appears, however, because a mysterious, green-skinned lad called Damien is quietly following the group from a distance, plotting to conquer the town.

FACT

Because he wears black clothing, Damien was named Black Kid in the Japanese version of the game. This was changed in the west for obvious reasons.

Snowboard Kids 2 plays similarly to its predecessor, but now it has a story mode to help you fill in all that white-hot Snowboard Kids lore you're undoubtedly passionate about. Joining Wendy are a few new hidden characters too, including a shop owner who's a dog (called Mr Dog), and a penguin who's a snowboard coach (called, that's right, Coach). Although Snowboard Kids is reasonably cheap in North America – comparatively speaking, at least – the PAL version is extremely rare. This is because it's only known to have been released in small numbers in Australia, meaning anyone in Europe hoping to play the game on a non-modded system will have to find a way to import a used Australian copy, and you're easily talking hundreds of dollars for a legit cart. ■

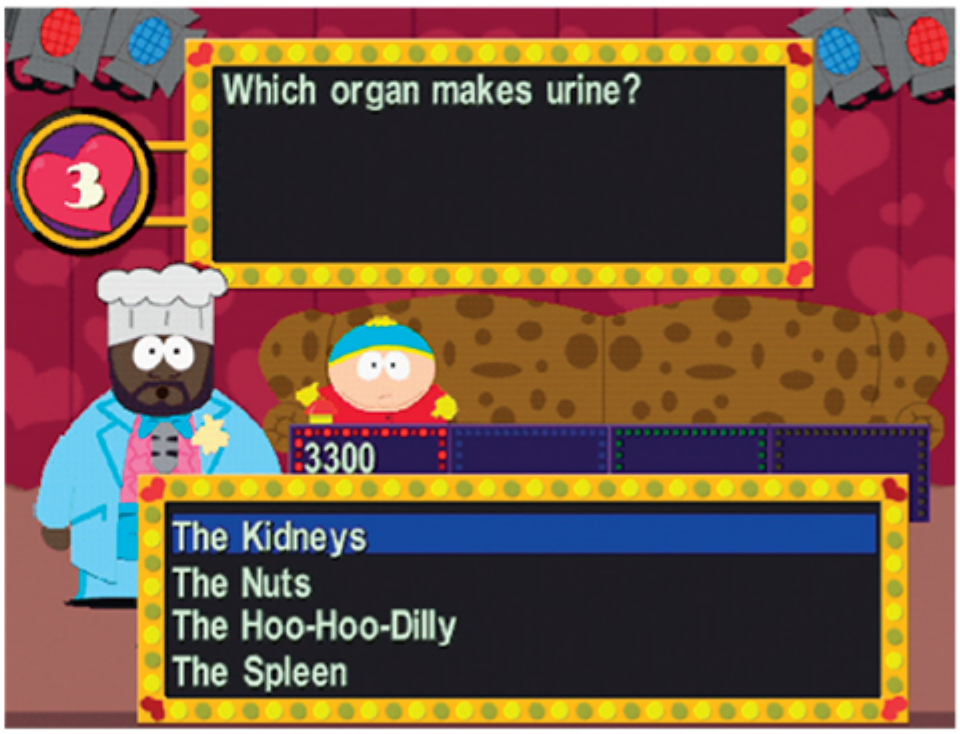
SOUTH PARK: CHEF'S LUV SHACK

Year	1999
Publisher	Acclaim
Developer	Acclaim Studios Austin

ARGUABLY THE MOST unique of the South Park games released on the Nintendo 64, Chef's Luv Shack is based on a quiz show hosted by Chef on local cable access TV (Channel 69, naturally). The show is supposed to have swimsuit models competing for a weekend of love with Chef. But because the swimsuit models are all 'in women's prison visiting their friends' (the manual's words, not mine), the contestants have been replaced by elementary school children. Hijinks ensue. The game is played by up to four players and naturally, given its game show structure, the more players involved the better. Choosing between Cartman, Kyle, Stan and Kenny, players take part in games that last either, two, four six or eight rounds. Each round is split into two sections: a trivia question and 'Game Time'. The trivia section is straightforward and contains a variety of surprisingly inoffensive questions with unsurprisingly offensive categories. For example, the 'Lesbian Role Models' category simply asks which country tennis player Martina Navratilova hails from. The Game Time section consists of 20 mini-games where players compete to aim for the highest score. These include such tasks as skiing down a hill while an avalanche chases you, trying to shoot the 'Chicken Lover' as he hides in bushes in the park, and a memory game in which school teacher Mr Mackey smacks a mutated monkey's four bums in a set order, which you then have to replicate. ■

FACT

In other versions of the game Chef reads every question out loud, but due to cartridge size limitations the N64 version has him introducing the question, then simply showing it as text.



SOUTH PARK

Year	1998
Publisher	Acclaim
Developer	Iguana Entertainment

WHEN *SOUTH PARK first came to TV screens in late* 1997, it became an almost immediate success. Matt Stone and Trey Parker's potty mouthed kids were a breath of fresh air (in a manner of speaking) and their steady stream of controversial moments were a huge source of publicity due to the continual column inches they gained. Naturally, the video game rights were quickly snapped up, with Acclaim being the lucky publisher to be the one to release a sure-fire hit. It tasked Iguana Entertainment with knocking out a *South Park* game in time for Christmas 1998, which it just about managed (December 21 in North America).

One of the reasons Iguana was able to turn a game around so quickly was because the South Park game is based on the Turok 2 game engine, and essentially plays very similar to that game but with South Park characters instead. Players control either Cartman, Kenny, Stan or Kyle as they take on five separate missions. After a comet crash-lands on Earth, an evil force flows out and starts infecting South Park, so it's up to the four lads to save the day by basically being extremely violent to anything behaving out of hand.

There are five missions in total, each set in a different location with a specific type of enemy to defeat. The first level, for example, is set around a Renaissance Fair and has our boys fighting an army of mutant turkeys. The second, meanwhile, takes them to the warehouse docks where they face a series of evil massive-headed clones. Mission 3 takes place in the mountains and has the kids fighting aliens and angry cows, while the fourth level involves robots taking over the Seismic Center. Finally, in the last stage the kids return to the streets of South Park to defeat a bunch of killer toys.

FACT

If you can't deal with an endless onslaught of turkeys, enter THEEARTHMOVED as a cheat code. Now when you pause the game you can choose a level and skip ahead.

One of the game's main selling points is the voice acting, which is provided by all the original cast from the TV show. While players can only choose between the four main boys in single-player mode, there's also a four-player multiplayer mode where a further 16 characters can be chosen, including the likes of Big Gay Al, Terrence and Philip and Mr Garrison. Each has their own generous helping of soundbites, meaning the game's almost funnier to listen to than it is to play. Sadly, some agreed with this sentiment: despite the clear authenticity in the voice acting and the like, the game's rushed nature was somewhat apparent, with even Parker and Stone criticising Acclaim's approach years down the line. Parker in particular referred to it as 'the crappiest video game' in a DVD commentary, adding that the pair were 'so bummed out' when they played it because of the endless stream of turkeys the player had to fight in the first stage alone. They claimed that despite Acclaim's constant requests, they refused to work closely with them on any further games. That's not to say Acclaim didn't make more anyway, as you can see in the surrounding pages. ■

SOUTH PARK RALLY

Year	2000	
Publisher	Acclaim	
Developer	Tantalus Interactive	

FOR ITS THIRD and final South Park game, Acclaim decided to go down a tried-and-tested route and released a karting game in a similar vein to Mario Kart 64. Well, I say a similar vein, but the only main similarity is that both games have characters in tiny cars: in reality, despite initially appearing to be a straightforward racer, South Park Rally actually takes a wildly different approach and changes the rules quite drastically. Nowhere in this game will you find straightforward racing with standard laps: instead, the main race type places checkpoints on an open map and tasks racers with driving over them in order (that's 1, 2, 3, 4 in case you weren't keeping up). The tracks provide many different routes to get to each checkpoint, so races become a somewhat madcap mess of racers driving in completely different directions in an attempt to reach each one before their opponents.

As you play through the game's main Championship mode you'll encounter a number of other race types, each with their own unique rules. In one event, for example, everyone has Mad Cow Disease and you have to keep the cure for a total of two minutes without someone stealing it from you. In another, players have to collect 10 chickens and drop them off at the police station before anyone else can. Then there's the Valentine's Day event, where players need to find both an arrow and bow, then use them to shoot other players.

FACT

The characters ditched for the N64 version are still mentioned in the game's code. So too is Ms Crabtree, the school bus driver, who was never playable in any version despite, you know, driving for a living.

Although these various race types do add some diversity to proceedings, most reviews at the time concluded that they were no match for standard Mario Kart style racing and as such South Park Rally received fairly middling reviews. That's not to say there was no attention to detail here, however, and fans of the show would have been overjoyed to find a huge cast of characters available for selection (27 in total, to be exact). As well as expected characters like the four main boys, Wendy and Chef, other unlockables are slightly more niche like Stan's grandpa, mad scientist Dr Mephesto and Jesus and Satan themselves. The N64 version's roster is a little reduced compared to other versions of the game: Cartman's mother, Kyle's mother and Scuzzlebutt aren't in this version, and neither are some unlockable outfits like Hip-Hop Cartman and William Wallace Chef.

The game's sense of humour expands to its weaponry as well. There are around 20 items which can be collected, many of which have comedic links to the main series. Players can collect an anal probe, for example, which comes out of their character's backside and fires a laser at opponents, or unleash Stan's dog Sparky on them, causing them to stop in their tracks while he exhibits 'animal passion' (according to the manual). Best of all, however, is 'Spooky-Vision', which blocks an opponent's screen with huge Saddam Hussein faces. Subtlety wasn't this game's strongest point. ■

SPACE INVADERS

Year	1999	✔	✕	✕
Publisher	Activision			
Developer	Z-Axis			

IF YOU REALLY don't know what Space Invaders is, you sweet summer child, then you may have accidentally picked this book up thinking it was an encyclopedia of the N6 4 postcode district in London's Highgate area. For everyone else, I'll spare you the usual history lesson on one of the most seminal video games of all time and will instead cut straight to the rundown on this attempt by Activision to bring the 1978 original forward 20 years into the future.

There had been many attempts to modernise Space Invaders in the two decades since Taito's classic original, but the Nintendo 64 version is arguably one of the better examples of how to do it right, by sticking to the core principles while building on them just enough to provide something new. The game consists of 100 stages set across eight planets, with the aim being to travel from planet to planet, taking out each wave and facing off against the enormous bosses that appear from time to time. The standard mechanics are obviously in place – players move left and right shooting upwards, while motherships occasionally pass across the top of the screen – but a number of new tricks have been added to provide a new level of strategy to proceedings.

There's now a colour-based power-up system, where a gauge at the top of the screen shows four bars. If you fill these bars by shooting

four enemies of the same colour in a row, you'll earn a power-up based on that colour. Shoot four red enemies, for example, and you'll earn a Vertical Blast power-up, which lets you shoot one bullet right through an entire column of enemies. Hit four blue or green ones in a row, and you'll get horizontal Left and Right Blasts respectively, meaning you can hit an enemy at the end of a row and see the bullet travel right across that row, taking out everyone else. By planning your shorts carefully, you can use one power-up to trigger another: if you have a Diagonal Blast weapon and can see a diagonal line of similarly coloured enemies, by taking them out you'll get that power-up in the process.

FACT

In a lovely retro touch the final boss, Golem, is actually the giant stone enemy from the side of the original Space Invaders arcade cabinet.

The enemies each have their own styles too, and no longer just move left to right like the originals. As you progress through each planet, you encounter new, more complex foes like the Blocker in Uranus (stop giggling) who sends out flaming shields to protect nearby colleagues as he dies, or the Anglers who appear on the planet Saturn and fire diagonal shots that bounce off walls towards you. Ultimately, the Nintendo 64 version of Space Invaders is a surprisingly competent reboot of an arcade classic, and while all its new gimmicks still aren't quite enough to make it more than a pretty simplistic shooter, it would be wrong to say it isn't an engaging one. ■

SPACE STATION SILICON VALLEY

Year	1998
Publisher	Take-Two Interactive
Developer	DMA Design

THERE'S A PROBLEM with Silicon Valley. Not the prolific centre of technology in California, nor the sitcom based on it, but the space station that was launched in 2001 as an experiment in artificial life and robotic evolution. Seven minutes after the station was launched it disappeared without a trace, and was considered a lost cause (literally). That was, until a thousand years later, when Silicon Valley was suddenly spotted by a giant telescope near Uranus (yes, yes, we did this on the last page). The Earth government sent out a bunch of space marines to investigate but they all mysteriously failed to return, so rather than risk even more skilled soldiers they instead sent out the cheapest adventurers they could find: Dan Danger and his robot chum Evo.

As my granny used to say, though, if you buy cheap you get cheap, and sure enough Dan and Evo crash their ship through Silicon Valley's glass ceiling, landing in a huge wreck. The pair are stuck and can't leave, but there's one fortunate twist: Evo's main microchip has popped out of his body and landed on the body of a dead dog (the ship landed on it, you see). It turns out Evo can insert his chip into animals and reanimate them, taking full control over them. It's up to Evo, then, to use the space station's animals to not only find a way back home, but also figure out exactly why it's shown up again after all this time.

These animals have evolved over time and integrated with Silicon Valley's tech, so they aren't your conventional moggies and mongrels. There are more than 40 animals to find and possess, and most of them have special abilities. There's a scorpion that can shoot electrical beams, for example, as well as a fox who's armed with a gun and a dog that has wings like a biplane. The aim is make use of these special abilities to carry out the missions in each of the game's 30 stages, in an attempt to regain control of the space station and maybe, just maybe, return it back to Earth for a big celebration (and one final twist ending).

FACT

There are actually two versions of the game in North America. The second batch (version 1.1) fixed a bug in which the game randomly crashed if you had an Expansion Pak.

Unlike other games developed by Scottish studio DMA Design (such as Body Harvest and that tiny indie one you might have heard of called Grand Theft Auto), Space Station Silicon Valley was a conscious effort to move away from the idea of an open world and provide the player with a series of smaller self-contained stages instead. As such, while you could argue that Body Harvest was a sort of spiritual predecessor to what DMA (as Rockstar) would later pull off in Grand Theft Auto III, Space Station Silicon Valley instead feels like a unique experiment by the studio that forces the player to try to get the most out of smaller areas instead of unleashing them on one massive one. ■

SPIDER-MAN

Year	2000	✔ ✕ ✕
Publisher	Activision	
Developer	Edge of Reality	

DURING THE 8-BIT and 16-bit eras, the quality of Spider-Man games saw more ups and downs than… well, Spider-Man himself, I suppose. His sole Nintendo 64 appearance, however, marked the first Spider-Man game published by Activision, and following a troubled past Spidey had finally reached what many considered to be a new high point at the time for the character's video game resumé, and the start of what was to become a string of top-notch titles.

The game opens at a science expo where Dr Otto Octavius, who's adamantly claiming that he's a changed man, is presenting a demonstration. Suddenly, someone who appears to be Spider-Man swings into the expo and steals the brand new technology the Doc was demonstrating. When Eddie Brock tries to take photos of Spider-Man doing the deed, the webslinger destroys his camera. That's enough to rile up the Venom symbiote inside Brock, and he vows that he'll destroy Spider-Man as punishment for this evil act of camera-crushery. What's more, the police have now started a manhunt to find Spider-Man and put him behind bars for this uncharacteristic disruption. There's just one little problem: Peter Parker was also at the presentation, and stood there watching the whole thing happen. So whoever this Spider-Man chap was, it sure as beans wasn't him.

While later Spider-Man games published by Activision would offer free roaming gameplay,

the series wasn't quite ready for such scale at this stage. As such, the game consists of linear stages in which Spidey makes his way through a preset adventure, beating up goons and fighting super villains along the way. The game's 34 levels are split into six different chapters, each of which is focused on a different grave danger that Spidey has to eventually find and prevent. First he has to prevent a Jade Syndicate bank heist and stop a bomb going off, then he has to rescue J. Jonah Jameson from Scorpion. Next is a trip to a power plant to stop Rhino destroying it, followed by a hunt around the city's sewer system in search of Venom and Lizard. Ten it's off to the Daily Bugle to defeat a bunch of symbiotes (as well discovering who was really behind the fake Spider-Man), before finally taking on Doc Ock, who it turns out hadn't turned over a new leaf after all.

FACT

The game uses the same engine as Tony Hawk's Pro Skater. To celebrate Activision owning both licences, Spider-Man is a hidden character in Tony Hawk 2.

Spidey can naturally swing with his webs (albeit to a limited degree) and can crawl on walls and ceilings to get around. He can also use his webs to stun enemies, dropping their guard so he can wade in with swift punches and kicks. There are also comics lying around, which unlock new Spider-Man costumes with included boosts (like the Spider-Man 2099 suit, which gives you double damage). As a nice touch, the entire game is narrated by Stan Lee, the co-creator of Spider-Man, and if ever there was a sign that this was a game made with love for the character and his legacy, that has to be it. ■

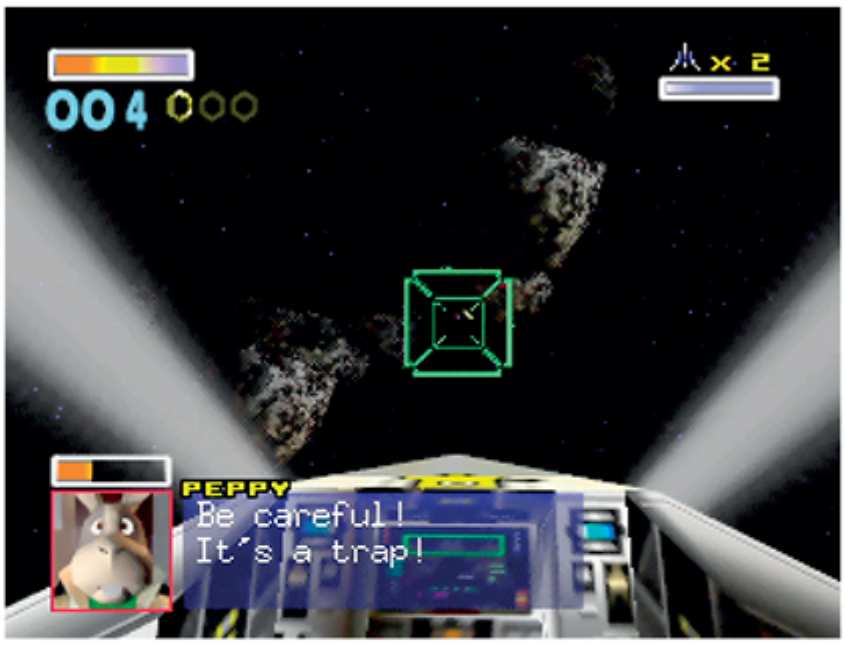
STAR FOX 64

Year	1997
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo EAD

THE ORIGINAL STAR Fox (or Star Wing as it was known in Europe) was a truly ground-breaking achievement, with the Super FX chip giving the SNES a unique style of polygonal graphics that were never thought possible on Nintendo's 16-bit console. Naturally, such angular achievements were bread and butter for the Nintendo 64, so rather than relying on its visual splendour to sell the game, Star Fox 64 (known as Lylat Wars in Europe) had to win players over by simply being a ruddy good game instead.

Although there's a plot in there it isn't massively different from that of the original game. Five years after Fox McCloud's father James is captured by the evil space tyrant Andross, the Star Fox team learns that Andross is starting another attack on the Lylat System. It's up to the team – Fox McCloud, Peppy Hare, Slippy Toad and Falco Lombardi – to head out on an adventure across the Lylat System as they attempt to reach Andross's based on the planet Venom and put an end to his terrorism for good. And if Fox can find out more about what happened to his old man, then all the better.

The game plays similarly to its SNES predecessor for the most part, with the majority of stages set on rails. The player can freely move around the screen as the game continues along its set path, with the main focus being on taking out the enemies that appear while avoiding their attacks and any other obstacles along the way.



Although the Star Fox team's trusty Arwing fighter craft is still the primary mode of transport, some stages swap it out for the Landmaster (a special armed tank that can barrel roll on the ground) or the Blue Marine (a combat mini submarine). Despite the generally on-rails nature the game will also occasionally switch to All-Range mode: this usually takes place during boss fights and lets players move wherever they like within a set area, making things feel more like they would in a dogfighting game. The game has a multiplayer versus mode for up to four players which also makes use of All-Range mode.

FACT

If you aren't a fan of the game's fancy new voice acting, the European version includes a 'Lylat' language option. This makes all the characters talk gibberish like in the SNES original.

Although Star Fox 64 couldn't rely on its predecessor's ability to appeal to players by letting them play something they'd never seen before on a console, it could at least offer them something they'd never felt before. The game was the first to support the Rumble Pak, Nintendo's iconic peripheral that plugged into the back of the controller and vibrated to the action on-screen, letting players feel every impact. Nintendo was so confident that the Rumble Pak would improve the Star Fox 64 experience that it bundled one with every copy of the game. Ultimately, as brilliant as this move was, it wasn't needed: Star Fox 64 is still fondly remembered to this day, not for the addition of the Rumble Pak but for being the pinnacle of a much-loved series with a certain magic to it that subsequent sequels just couldn't quite match. ■

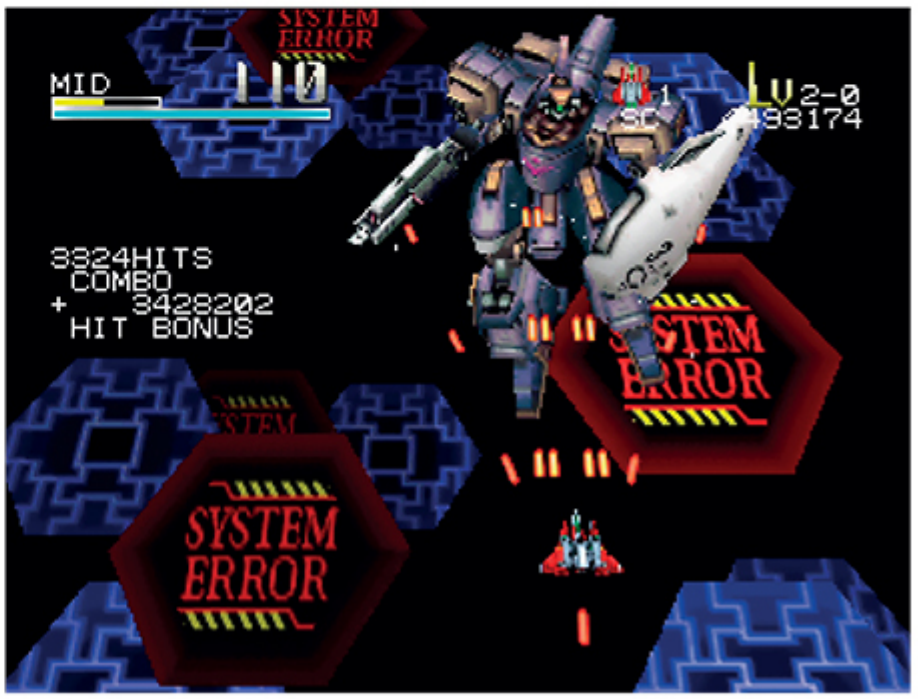
STAR SOLDIER: VANISHING EARTH

Year 1998
Publisher Electro Brain / Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

HUDSON SOFT'S STAR Soldier series was a cult favourite among shoot 'em up fans in Japan, with each entry making guest appearances at Hudson's annual All-Japan Caravan Festivals, which were a series of national gaming tournaments. Each show would often include a Star Soldier tournament, in which players would be given a set amount of time (usually two or five minutes) and would have to score as many points as possible. Vanishing Earth is the fifth main game in the Star Soldier series and plays similarly to its predecessors, albeit with a new polygonal art style instead of the usual sprite-based work. At its core it's a fairly basic shoot 'em up but the main draw here is obviously the high score system. Players can build combos by destroying numerous enemies in quick succession, and the longer a combo runs the more the bonus points build up. Rather than swapping weapons during gameplay, players simply choose between three separate ships, each with their own different weaponry. There's also a new rolling move which makes you temporarily invincible to bullets. True to the history of the Caravan tournaments, the game has separate two minute and five minute modes, where players have to score as many points as possible within those time limits. Given that the Nintendo 64 didn't have many shoot 'em ups this was a solid enough effort, but fans of the series would generally agree that it wasn't the best of the bunch by any means. ■

FACT

In recent years Japanese publisher Hamster Corporation has released hundreds of retro games through its Arcade Archives and ACA Neo Geo series. Almost every game has a timed Caravan mode, in honour of Hudson's festivals.



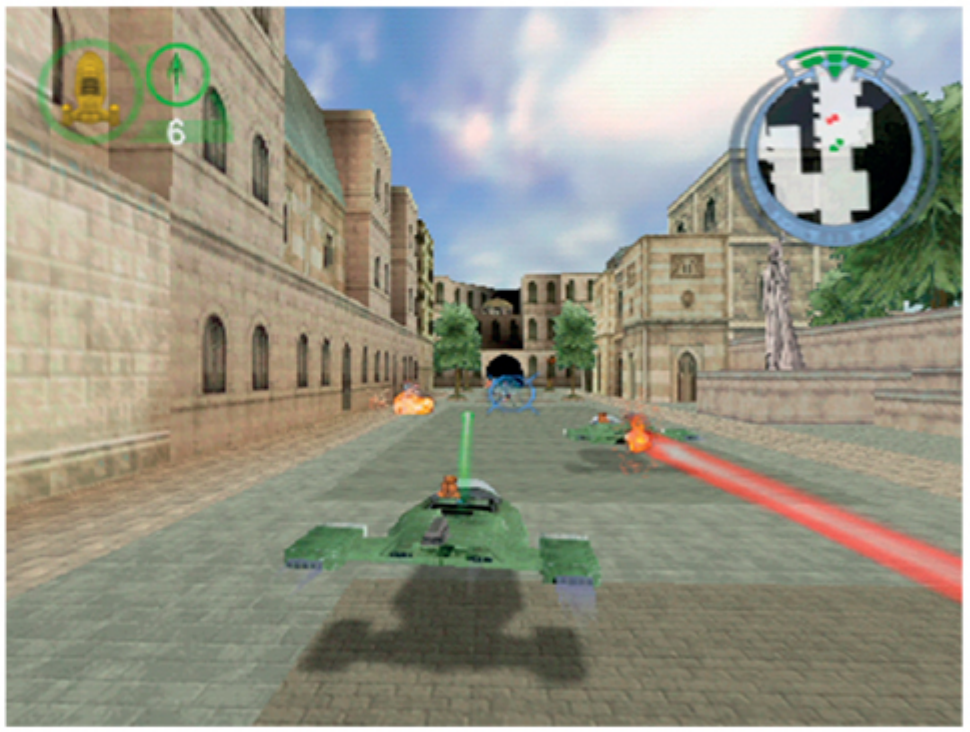
STAR WARS EPISODE I: BATTLE FOR NABOO

Year 2000
Publisher LucasArts / THQ
Developer Factor 5 / LucasArts

AFTER ENJOYING CRITICAL success with Star Wars: Rogue Squadron, LucasArts and developer Factor 5 decided to double down on their winning formula with this spin-off, which featured similar aerial combat but was based on *Star Wars Episode I* instead of the original trilogy. Although the game technically follows the story of the *Episode I* movie, it doesn't completely replicate the events of the film due to the game's emphasis on air combat, of which *Episode I* didn't have an awful lot. As such, many of the 15 levels included here are brand new storylines which run parallel to the events of the film. So while the likes of Obi-Wan Kenobi, Qui-Gon Jinn and Jar Jar Binks were off doing their own on-foot shenanigans, Battle for Naboo takes a look at what was going on elsewhere. One minute you're trying to escape the streets of Teed following an attack by the Trade Federation, the next you're off to a snow-covered mountain planet as you protect newly recruited resistance member Borvo the Hutt, then it's back to Teed to help create a diversion that will enable the capture of Viceroy Nute Gunray. Although the game naturally bears a lot of similarities to Rogue Squadron, the engine was recreated entirely from scratch in order to improve on what was already possible. The most notable result of this is vastly superior draw distances that Factor 5 claimed wouldn't have been possible using Rogue Squadron's original engine. ■

FACT

All three Rogue Squadron games and Battle For Naboo feature a 1969 Buick Electra car as a hidden vehicle. It's based on Factor 5 employee Rudolf Stember's personal car.



STAR WARS EPISODE I: RACER

Year	1999
Publisher	LucasArts
Developer	LucasArts

WHEN YOU CONSIDER that George Lucas had owned all the merchandising rights to *Star Wars* ever since the first movie was released in 1977, it didn't take an enormous cynic to see the podracing sequence in *Star Wars Episode I* and immediately start to wonder if the scene was created entirely with a video game tie-in in mind. Sure enough, Star Wars Episode I: Racer is a racing game built entirely around that one sequence in the film, though it's been significantly expanded upon to offer a wider range of experiences for the player.

Naturally, the main Boonta Classic track from the movie is in there, and it goes without saying that players can control Anakin Skywalker as he takes on a variety of other weird and wonderful looking characters in his floating podracer. The game takes things much further than the film with both its tracks and characters, though. There are 25 courses in total, spanning a variety of planets, some of which were created for this game. Whether it's the Fire Mountain Rally in the planet Baroonda or the Bumpy's Breakers track in the aquatic planet of Aquilaris, there's a variety of environments to be found here. Similarly, if Anakin's annoying child voice and attitude irritates you there are 22 other racers to choose from, ranging from Sebulba (Anakin's rival in the film), to a bunch of other characters who either appeared in 'blink and you'll miss them' scenes or didn't even appear at all and make their debuts here.

FACT

A PS2-exclusive sequel called Star Wars Racer Revenge was released in 2002, and takes place eight years after the events of Episode I, which means Anakin now looks like Hayden Christensen.

The actual racing itself is typically fast with players navigating their floating ships through a variety of track types. It's possible to tilt your racer to the side to squeeze through narrow vertical gaps should the need arise, and there's also an interesting boost mechanic which offers a degree of risk and reward. Once you hit your maximum speed, you hold up on the Control Stick to start charging your booster. Once it fills up, you tap the accelerator again and you blast off at an extremely high speed. The problem with this is that not only is your handling reduced somewhat, the ship's temperature also starts to slowly rise meaning you have to eventually take your finger off the accelerator before you explode.

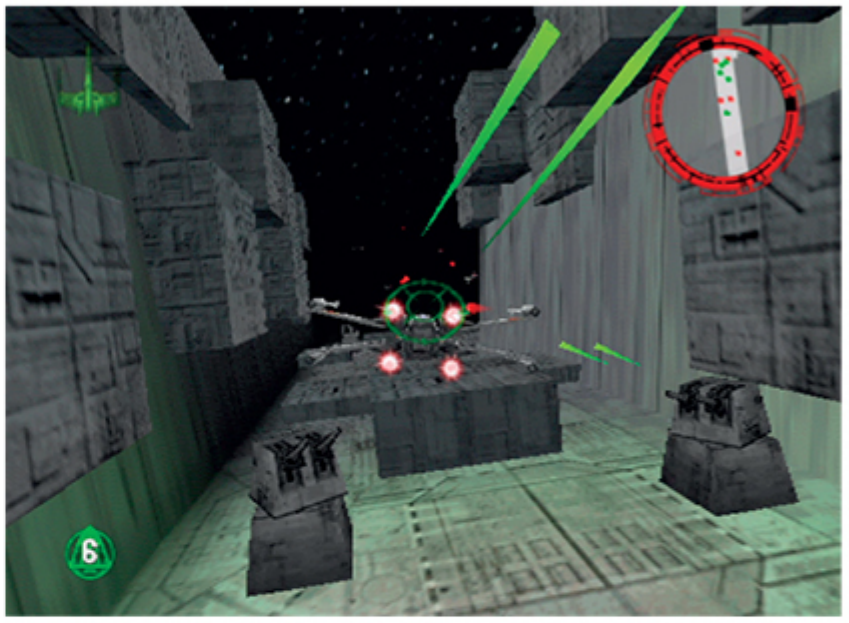
Star Wars Episode I: Racer is widely regarded to be one of the better Star Wars titles available, certainly of its era at least. If you've never played it and fancy trying it out there are better versions than the Nintendo 64 original. The Dreamcast version released the following year performed better, while in 2020 a special HD version was released for the Nintendo Switch, Xbox One and PlayStation 4, allowing a new generation of players to enjoy it with significantly improved visuals (and even motion controls on the Switch, with each Joy-Con controller handling one of the podracer's two engines). However you decide to play it, there's a fun time to be had. ■

STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON

Year	1998
Publisher	LucasArts / Nintendo
Developer	Factor 5 / LucasArts

IN THE PERIOD between 1998 and 2003, Californian developer Factor 5 released a quadrilogy of games that many still hold up in high regard as among the greatest *Star Wars* themed titles ever released: a proud crown to wear, given that there have been well over 100 of them over the years. The first of Factor 5's fantastic foursome was Star Wars: Rogue Squadron, an arcade-style aerial combat game where players get to find out what happened in between the events of Episode IV: *A New Hope* and Episode V: *The Empire Strikes Back*. Players step into the shoes of Luke Skywalker as he takes on a variety of missions, including protecting the Mos Eisley spaceport from an ambush to saving Han Solo's home planet Corellia from an Empire invasion. There's also the opportunity to infiltrate the Empire's prison facility on the planet Kessel, as well as carrying out a sneak attack on a factory planet called Balmorra, where advanced weapons of destruction are built for Imperial forces.

The variety of environments is matched only by the variety of spacecraft available to you. Depending on which of the 16 missions you're playing, you get to choose from a selection of five aircraft: an X-wing, an A-wing, a Y-wing, a V-wing or a snowspeeder. At first you can only play as a specific craft, but once the mission is completed you can replay it with a different one. Each craft also has a secondary weapon useful for the job at hand: the snowspeeder in particular has a tow cable which can be used to wrap around the legs of AT-ATs and pull them to their knees, as in *The Empire Strikes Back*.



FACT

Factor 5 and Lucasfilm took a huge gamble and added a hidden playable Naboo Starfighter from *Episode I*, which was still six months away and shrouded in secrecy. The cheat code was revealed when *Episode I* was released: most of the dev team didn't even know it existed.

The main game itself contains entirely original missions rather than pulling directly from the films: a request made by Lucasfilm, which was iffy about dipping into that particular well too many times. There was some compromise made, however, with the three bonus levels, which do nod more to the original trilogy. In these bonus stages, players can ride a T-16 Skyhopper through Beggar's Canyon and race against Wedge Antilles, take part in the Battle of Hoth from *The Empire Strikes Back* or even recreate the climactic Death Star trench run from the end of the first movie.

Rogue Squadron received great praise for its fantastic action and its impressive visuals. The latter could be improved further if players owned the Expansion Pak, which took the original 320 x 240 resolution and bumped it up to 640 x 480. Factor 5's work would be so well regarded that it would go on to create three more games in the series, including the Episode I spinoff mentioned earlier and two GameCube sequels, the first of which – Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader – was a launch title and arguably the most famous of the entire series. But that's hopefully for another book. ■

STAR WARS: SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE

Year	1996
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	LucasArts

AS ONE OF the big early third-party releases on the Nintendo 64, Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire was an important release. Not only for Nintendo, who wanted to show both players and publishers what it was possible for third-parties to pull off on its console, but also for LucasArts, which was keen to get on board with a new console from the earliest possible stage to establish itself as one of its key third-party publishers (as such, when work began on the game, the Nintendo 64 hardware hadn't even been finalised yet). The result was a game that had its detractors, but also provided an interesting new story for Star Wars fans to play through, rather than another recap of the original trilogy.

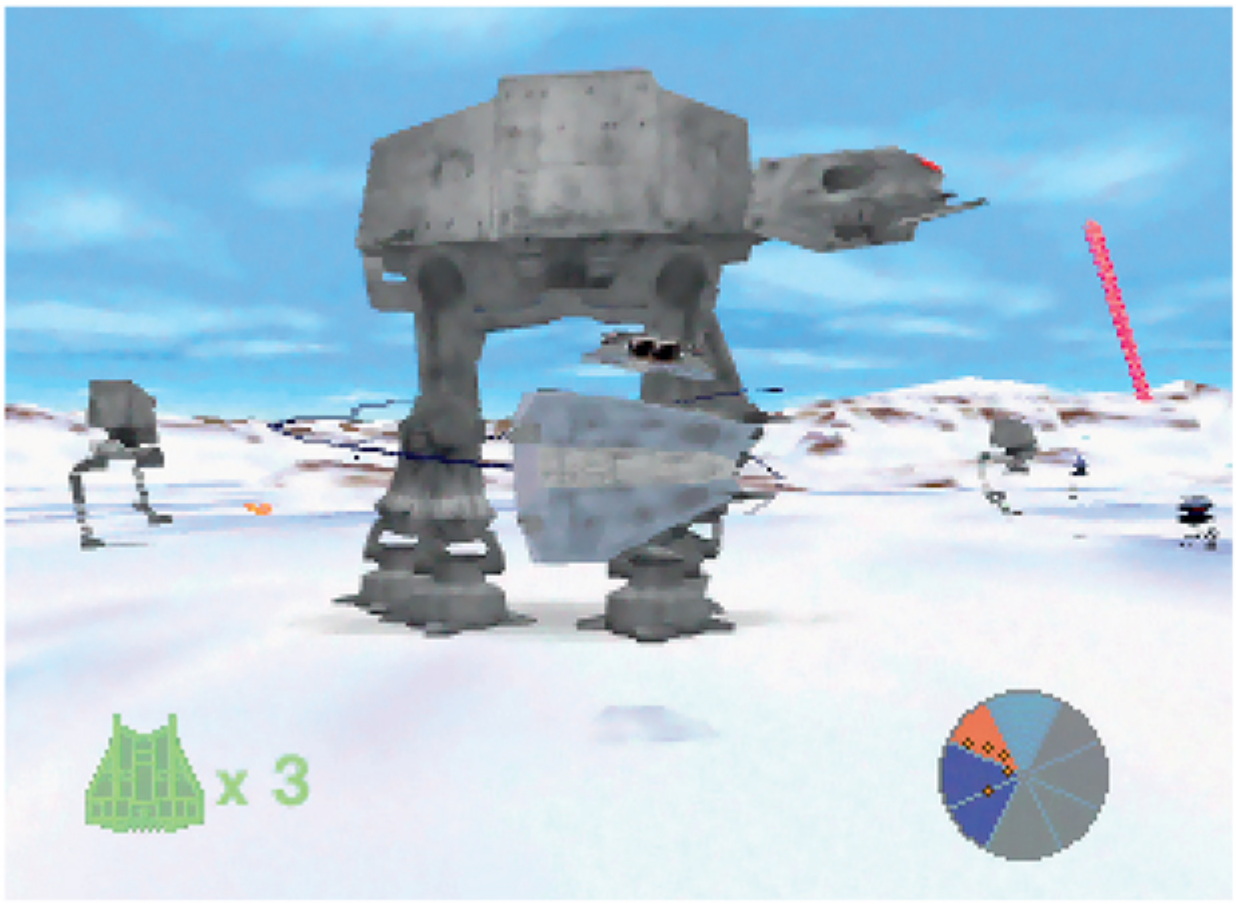
The game's storyline takes place roughly from the start of *The Empire Strikes Back* onwards, and has players taking control of Dash Rendar, a new character who it turns out had a lot of involvement in the Rebels' ongoing battle against the Empire. The game is split into four main parts, each containing a few different levels. To go into the details of each would require well more than a page, but the names of these sections – The Battle of Hoth, In Search of Boba Fett, Hunting the Assassins and Lair of the Dark Prince – should give a rough idea as to what to expect in each chapter.

Shadows of the Empire is mainly a third-person action game but a number of missions deviate from this and throw in other gameplay styles, be that flying a snowspeeder on Hoth and bringing down AT-ATs, manning the turrets on Render's ship the *Outrider* and gunning down countless enemies in space, or racing through the streets of Mos Eisley and Beggar's Canyon on a swoop bike.

FACT

As part of the expanded universe, Dash Rendar wouldn't be considered a canon Star Wars character these days, but the fact he was mentioned in a 2018 book released to tie in with the movie *Solo: A Star Wars Story* makes him legit.

The game was notable at the time for its use of digitised music, instead of the synthesised MIDI files many other Nintendo 64 games used. It was decided that the MIDI versions didn't sound effective enough for a Star Wars game and so – with cooperation from Nintendo, which increased the cartridge size to 12 MB, which was hefty for a launch game – Shadows of the Empire included around 15 minutes of low quality but effective digitised music designed to give things more of a cinematic feel.



Ultimately, Shadows of the Empire may not have gone down as one of the greatest Star Wars games ever made, but as an early third-party exclusive, it was an impressive enough outing. Not only did it succeed in helping Nintendo show what the N64 was capable of, it also established LucasArts as a solid backer of Nintendo's new system, something that would pay off later with the games seen on previous pages. It also gave Star Wars fans a brand new adventure to explore, and an opportunity to see what some of their favourite characters like Han Solo and Princess Leia were getting up to in between the events of the main movies. ■

STARCRAFT 64

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Blizzard / Mass Media Games

STARCRAFT HAS BECOME something of a phenomenon in the more than two decades since it was originally released. The game continues to be played to this day, especially in Asia where it has an enormous following. This Nintendo 64 port is a valiant attempt to bring the complex real-time strategy game to consoles, and while some sacrifices naturally had to be made to fit everything in, the result is remarkably faithful for a console port. Players can choose between three different races: the Protoss, which specialises in creating advanced technology which is powerful but takes a while to build; the Zerg, a group of insectoids that can produce equipment that's fairly weak but can be made quickly; and the Terrans, a group of humanoids who fit somewhere in the middle. As well as the full single-player campaign of the original StarCraf, players with the N64 Expansion Pak can also gain access to the game's expansion mission, Brood War, which carried on the story and essentially doubled the game's length. The Expansion Pak also unlocked a series of two-player options, including a co-op mode and a deathmatch mode (in which both players fight to the death, naturally). The latter is a significantly different experience to that experienced on PC, as the split-screen display makes it a lot easier to see what your opponent is up to, making surprise attacks far less likely. ■

FACT

In 2017, Blizzard made the original PC version of StarCraft and its Brood War expansion free to download and play, with an optional paid 'Remastered' HD upgrade.

STARSHOT: SPACE CIRCUS FEVER

Year 1998
Publisher Infogrames
Developer Infogrames

SPARE A THOUGHT for the Space Circus. It used to be one of the greatest shows in the galaxy but it's now struggling thanks to its new rival, Virtua Circus, which is stealing all its customers. To be fair though, it's hard to compete with someone who's committing intergalactic theft on a gross scale. You see, Virtua Circus's owner Wolfgang von Ravel has been making digital recreations of the natural wonders of space – the Milky Way, the Big Dipper, the rings of Saturn and the like – which in itself would be perfectly fine. The problem is, after digitally capturing each phenomenon, von Ravel is then destroying them, so the only place people can see them is by paying to attend his Virtua Circus show. In order to avoid bankruptcy, the Space Circus sends out its young juggler, Starshot, and tasks him with travelling to different planets (including a decimated thirty-second century Earth following a Martian invasion) to find and retrieve new attractions – the ghost dog Laika, the last Earthling survivor and the like – before heading to Virtua Circus to try and put an end to von Ravel's destructive scheme. The game is a 3D platformer consisting of seven large open worlds, and Starshot's main gimmick is his ability to fire missiles which can be controlled with the Control Stick. While its scope and ambition were praised – the game has over 300 NPCs to talk to – critics cited its camera and frame rate as problems. ■

FACT

Starshot is one of only a handful of N64 games with an anamorphic widescreen option, which squashes the picture so a widescreen TV can stretch it out, instead of adding borders at the top and bottom.

STUNT RACER 64

Year	2000
Publisher	Midway
Developer	Boss Game Studios

STUNT RACER 64 is a game that not a lot of people will have played, but those who have generally sing its praises. The game is set in the year 3000 and sees a group of racers all brought together to take part in a special racing tournament. Despite its futuristic setting, most of the 29 cars that can be selected and unlocked are retro-themed, meaning players can choose between the likes of '50s Cadillacs and '30s Fords (though they aren't officially branded). There are 11 tracks, and the general aim is to win each race while collecting coins along the way. These coins can then be spent on upgrading your car or buying new ones. The amount of money you get is linked to not only your finishing position, but also how many coins you collect on the track. If you finish in first place, you get to keep them all, finishing in second lets you keep half of them and so on. Despite the title, the stunts in Stunt Racer 64 are fairly straightforward, with rolls and flips very much the order of the day. That said, there are still halfpipes and stunt tracks where players can be scored depending on how well they pull off certain tricks. The game's fairly limited release – it was released exclusively as a rental in Blockbuster Video stores – means that Stunt Race 64 is quite hard to get hold of these days, and it can be difficult to find just the cartridge on its own for less than $300, let alone a boxed version. ■

FACT

In May 2000, trade magazine *MCV* was told by Midway that Stunt Racer 64 had been terminated 'due to a missed delivery date' from the developer. By October it had changed its mind and arranged the Blockbuster deal.

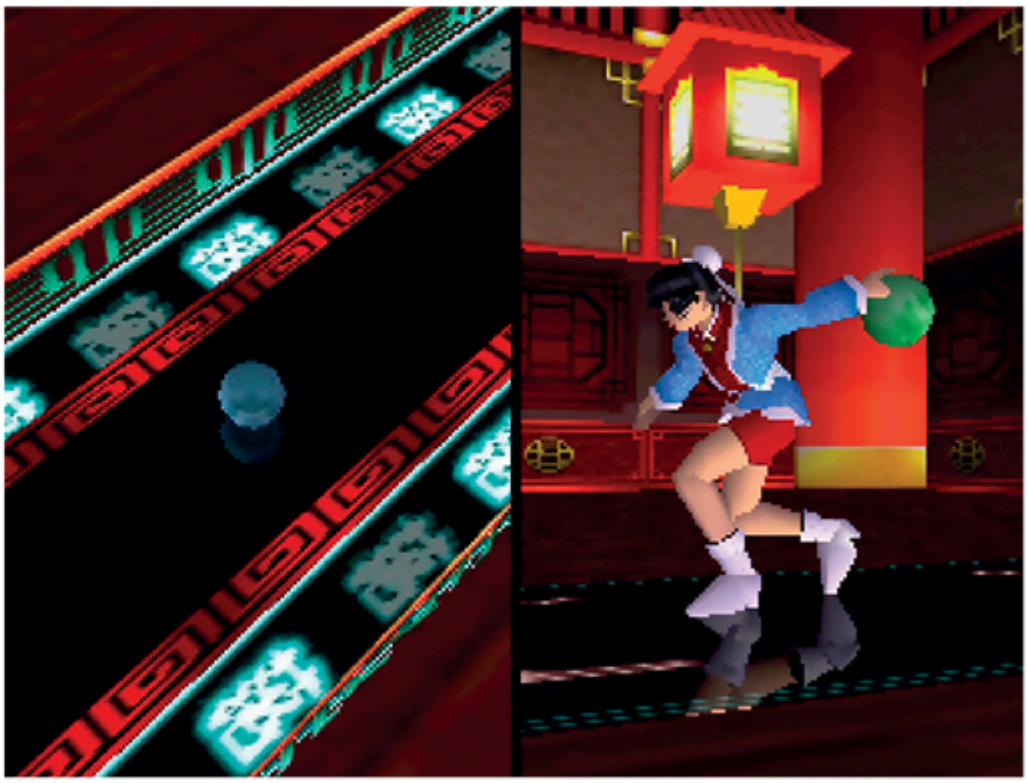
SUPER BOWLING

Year	1999
Publisher	UFO Interactive / Athena
Developer	Athena

THIS IS PROBABLY one of the most expensive pages in the entire book, because not only is Stunt Racer 64 a relatively rare game, Super Bowling is even harder to come by and as such is considered one of the rarest western releases on the console. The game uses an interesting split-screen style where two players can bowl at the same time: this speeds things up and ensures you're always playing instead of sitting there and waiting for your opponent to take their shot. If you're playing solo, the right side of the screen is instead used for various camera angles to give you a more dramatic viewpoint of each throw. As well as standard bowling there's also a special Doubles version, where players share a game and take turns bowling. There are also some other interesting modes including Golf Bowling, where you're given a selection of 'holes' where certain pins are laid out and you have to clear them within a certain number of shots to try and stay above par. There's also a Challenge Bowling mode, where you have to knock over a difficult split in your first try, or else you can't move on to the next stage. Super Bowling is another cartridge that is extremely difficult to find for anything less than a few hundred dollars, so if you're hoping to complete your N64 collection you may want to rip this page out of the book and pretend it doesn't exist. ■

FACT

Athena was founded in 1987 and released (among other things) a number of bowling games over the years. The NES, SNES, Game Boy, Game Boy Color and N64 all got Athena bowling games.



SUPER MARIO 64

Year	1996
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo EAD

THE BEST LAUNCH games are the ones that demonstrate a console's new features (as previously seen in the *SNES Encyclopedia*, with F-Zero's use of the Mode 7 effect). Super Mario 64 may be the greatest example of a launch game serving that exact purpose, because it ensured that almost every major new feature boasted by the N64 (with the obvious exception of four-player support) was shown off in the best possible way on day one.

The game opens with Mario receiving a letter from Princess Toadstool (referring to herself as Peach for the first time in the west), informing him that she's baked a cake for him. Always in favour of foodstuffs, Mario heads to Peach's Castle only to discover that it's been invaded by Bowser. What's more, he's stolen the 120 Power Stars, which are used to protect the castle. The key to saving the day lies in retrieving the Power Stars from the 15 worlds found inside the castle's magic paintings, but Mario needs to be careful because Bowser has infested each of those worlds with enemies.

The game's hub area is Peach's Castle itself, which is where the aforementioned paintings can be found. Each painting contains a portal to a different world, each of which holds seven Power Stars. Some doors in the castle have been locked by Bowser and can only be opened with a certain number of Power Stars. The aim, then, is to visit the paintings you already have access to and collect

as many Power Stars as possible to gain access to newer areas. What makes Super Mario 64 so different from its predecessors is the switch from linear 2D platforming to open world exploration. Each world can be freely explored, which extends to the non-linear way the progression system works. If players are struggling to find Power Stars in one world, they can just quit back to Peach's Castle and go to a different world instead. Indeed, although there are 120 stars to collect in the game, the player only needs 70 to reach the final battle with Bowser, meaning each player can essentially customise their own journey to the credits, even missing out entire worlds should they so wish.

FACT

There's a single Goomba in the game that's impossible to kill, because it spawns at the bottom of the floor in the Bowser in the Sky stage and is there for only a single frame before it disappears.

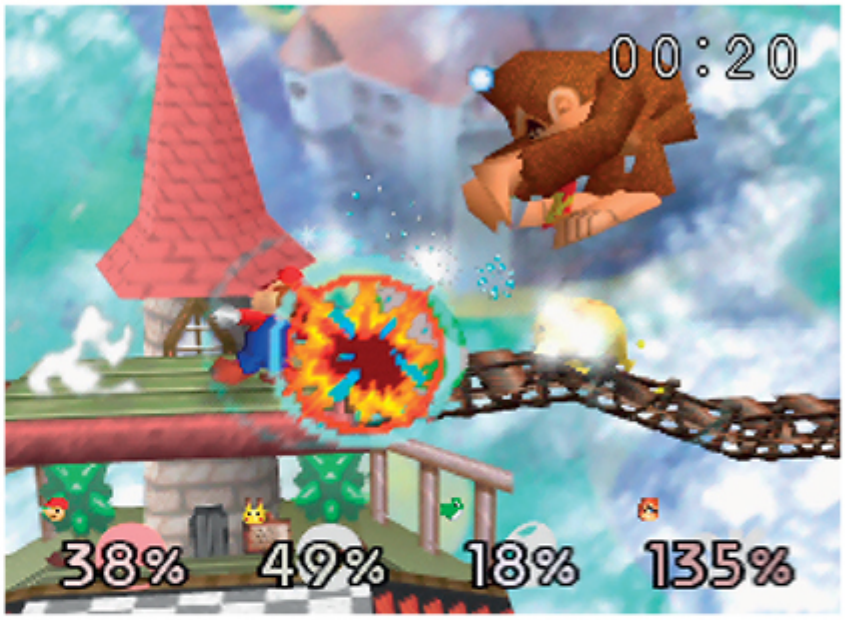
While the obvious switch from sprites to polygons made an enormous difference to the structure of the game, it's the addition of the Control Stick that really transformed the platforming genre. Mario 64 wasn't the first game to feature 3D platforming – the likes of Jumping Flash and Floating Runner preceded it – but it was the combination of proper open world exploration and an analogue stick that made it feel truly revolutionary and rewrote the rules of one of gaming's most popular genres. There have been many launch titles over the years that provided players with an example of how different the new generation of games would look, but Super Mario 64 is one of those rare launch titles that showed how different the new generation would play. ■

SUPER SMASH BROS.

Year	1999
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	HAL Laboratory

GIVEN NINTENDO'S REPUTATION for making family-friendly games, it was something of a surprise when it was initially announced that it was working on Super Smash Bros., a fighting game featuring multiple characters from various Nintendo IPs. While Mario spin-offs were nothing new (as a quick flick through this book makes clear), the idea of placing him in a game with other Nintendo characters and making them kick seven shades of 'shrooms out of each other was certainly not something that anyone had predicted. It turned out to be a brilliant idea, however, as Super Smash Bros. quickly gained a reputation as one of the most entertaining four-player party games on the console.

The roster initially consists of eight characters, each representing a different Nintendo franchise: Mario, Yoshi, Donkey Kong, Link, Samus, Kirby, Fox McCloud and Pikachu. By clearing the single-player mode and its Break the Targets mini-game, players could also unlock four more characters: Luigi, Jigglypuff, Captain Falcon from F-Zero and Ness from Earthbound (incidentally, this meant Smash Bros. was the only N64 appearance for Samus and Ness). The characters are only half the fun, however, as each of the game's nine stages are also based on Nintendo games: whether you're fighting on the rooftops of Peach's Castle or Hyrule Castle, battling on top of an Arwing as it flies through Sector Z, or trying to dodge the attacks from



onlooking Pokémon in Saffron City, the whole game is a clear love letter to all things Nintendo.

The actual fighting mechanics played a huge part in the success of Super Smash Bros. as well. Whereas the vast majority of fighting games at the time involved reducing your opponent's health bar to zero, Smash Bros. does the opposite and starts each player with 0 per cent damage, a figure that increases each time they take a hit. As the percentage increases, the character flies further when hit with strong attacks: the aim, then, is to defeat your opponent by hitting them hard enough that they fly off the edge, bottom or top of the screen. The actual nature of the combat is different too: rather than two fighters facing each other on a single flat plane, up to four characters fight simultaneously on what could best be described as a small platformer stage, with a bunch of separate platforms and other gimmicks like power-ups, weapons and even Pokéballs you can throw to summon Pokémon to fight on your behalf.

FACT

The game was originally supposed to have Final Smash moves, which weren't introduced until the third entry, Brawl, on the Wii. There are some unused voice samples in the cartridge of the likes of Pikachu, Kirby and Ness performing them.

Super Smash Bros.' success speaks for itself: the series would go on to spawn sequels on every Nintendo home console that would follow, culminating (at the time of writing) with the ridiculous Super Smash Bros. Ultimate on Switch, with its final roster of nearly 90 characters. And yet, it's a testament to how well Nintendo nailed it on its first attempt that fans of Ultimate can try out the Nintendo 64 game for the first time and play it perfectly well with just a brief period of adjustment. ■

SUPERMAN: THE NEW SUPERMAN ADVENTURES

Year	1999
Publisher	Titus Software
Developer	Titus Interactive

THERE HAVE BEEN a few games over the years that have earned the unenviable reputation of being considered one of the worst games ever made. The likes of E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial on the Atari 2600, 3DO FMV game Plumbers Don't Wear Ties and the Zelda games on the Philips CD-i regularly appear on these lists, and unfortunately Superman: The New Superman Adventures is also one such title. You may know it as Superman 64, which was never actually its name but appears to have stuck, to the extent that if you flicked specifically to this page that's the title you were probably looking for.

The game's story revolves around a virtual Metropolis which has been created by the evil Lex Luthor. Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen and Professor Emil Hamilton have all been trapped in this fake Metropolis, which conveniently has a lot more fog than the normal Metropolis (which definitely doesn't have anything to do with how badly the game runs or anything like that). It's up to Superman to enter the portal to Lex Luthor's fake Metropolis (his Fauxtropolis, if you will) and rescue his friends before they meet their doom.

The game consists of 14 stages, which are split into two different styles. The most notorious – most likely just because it's the first one the player encounters – consists of solving Lex Luthor's 'mazes', which basically just means flying through a load of rings in the sky before a timer runs out. Quite what makes this a maze I'm not really certain, but then a lot of things in this game aren't exactly clear. The sky, for one. Each of these stages has a number of ring-flying sections, and in between them Supes has to perform various other small tasks, such as saving pedestrians from speeding cars (by picking them up and throwing them away), or escorting police cars away from rocket-launching enemies (by, um… picking them up and throwing them away).

If you manage to make your way through this frustrating series of ring-based challenges, you'll reach the second game style, the indoor sections. Here, Superman runs around fighting enemies as he explores such locations as a warehouse, the LexCorp building and STAR Labs. These sections were harshly criticised for their extremely awkward combat, their frustrating camera angles and Superman's clunky controls, which often find him getting stuck in the wall with no way to turn the camera around to see him.

Ultimately, Superman has become shorthand for terrible games. A lot of other 'bad' video games are nowhere near the worst ever, but are associated with that label because someone (usually online) branded them that way and the gaming community, who love an excuse to have a kick at something, happily accept it to be the case (see Night Trap on the Mega CD as a shining example of this). Superman, however, is one of those situations where the criticism is probably warranted, and playing it really isn't recommended for any reason other than morbid curiosity. ■

FACT

Titus founder Eric Caen blamed the Superman 64 disaster on Warner Bros' licensing team, who he says fought him every step of the way. According to Caen, Warner Bros wanted Titus to make a SimCity style game instead where Superman was the mayor of Metropolis.

SUPERCROSS 2000

Year 1999
Publisher EA Sports
Developer MBL Research

A COUPLE OF months before Acclaim released Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000, EA released its own game based on the sport, minus McGrath. His absence was made up for with the addition of 24 other real life supercross stars, including the likes of Mike Metzger, Mike LaRocco, Mike Brown and a few other guys not called Mike. On top of that, the game also features 16 tracks set in actual real-world venues such as Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, the TransWorld Dome in St Louis and the Houston Astrodome. The game's simulation-based handling means players may initially struggle to get around the tracks, but over time, they learn how to approach jumps properly in a manner that doesn't result in smacking into the wall every time they land. Players can choose to dip their toe in with single races, or just cannonball dive into an entire season where they race through all the tracks in succession. Pulling off stunts during races brings up the 'stunt cam', a nifty little picture-in-picture window which shows a replay of your trick while the race continues (and is just as distracting as it sounds). Commentary is provided by Art Eckman of ESPN, though it's fairly limited, and naturally a game as gnarly as this requires a suitably hip soundtrack, so the game's tracklist is performed by the likes of Pulley, 40 Watt Domain and MxPx. No, me neither. ■

FACT

The game has a surprising number of cheat codes that change the gravity so it matches any other planet in the solar system, or the moon.

TARZAN

Year 2000
Publisher Activision
Developer Eurocom

WHILE THE PLAYSTATION has a reasonable selection of 2.5D platformers in its library, the Nintendo 64 didn't really get too many of them. One exception to this is Tarzan, Eurocom's rendition of the 1999 Walt Disney movie. You know, the one with the Phil Collins song. Yes, that one. Sorry to bring up bad memories. The game naturally follows the story of the movie and has you starting off as young Tarzan before eventually switching to the adult version (by which I mean he's older, not that he bins his loincloth). The gameplay is standard stuff but solid enough, as players collect coins (100 for an extra life, naturally), letters spelling out T-A-R-Z-A-N and pencil sketch pieces which unlock bonus mini-games. These bonus games have you riding down rivers on giant leaves, grinding along branches Tony Hawk style, riding through levels on elephants and the like. Although in many ways Tarzan plays like your standard common or garden 2.5D platformer, it doesn't conform to every single trope and cliché. Most notably, Tarzan can't kill enemies by jumping on them, he'll take damage as a result. Instead, enemies can be defeated by either collecting and throwing fruit at them, or by resorting to Tarzan's trusty knife. This leads to the rather unnerving sight of a small child stabbing a monkey to death, but when you're in the jungle needs must, I suppose. ■

FACT

Tarzan has a hidden widescreen mode. It's long, but using the D-Pad enter L, R, U, D and you'll hear a noise, then enter L, R, L, R, L, R, U, D, L, R, L, R, L, R, U, D to get it.

TAZ EXPRESS

Year	2000
Publisher	Infogrames
Developer	Zed Two

THE TASMANIAN DEVIL is a bit of a lazy sod, and his wife the She-Devil isn't very happy about his lack of get-up-and-go. To remedy this, she signs her hubby up for a new job with Taz Express, a next-day courier service. It's up to Taz, then, to deliver his parcel by getting it from one end of each stage to the other while making sure it doesn't take any damage (if only some modern delivery companies were so thoughtful). Naturally, there are all manner of hazards in Taz's way that make this task easier said than done, and at times Taz will have to drop his parcel and carry on without it in order to reach certain areas, meaning on occasion it'll be exposed to danger. Taz can pull off his famous spin-dash attack, which can be used to destroy the environment, but in this game he has to build up to it by running at full speed for a while before he can build up enough momentum to trigger it. Despite being one of the few Nintendo 64 games exclusive to Europe and Australia, Taz Express doesn't quite fetch the many hundreds of dollars you may expect it to go for on the likes of eBay. This may be because the game's copy protection makes it extremely difficult for Americans to play it, even with a converter cartridge.

FACT

Folklore says that the Taz character was 'retired' after his first appearance in 1954 because producer Edward Selzer said he was 'too obnoxious'. He returned three years later when Jack Warner told Selzer he'd received boxes of fan mail from people who loved Taz.

TETRISPHERE

Year	1997
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	H20 Entertainment

IT MUST BE enough pressure in itself to deliver the first puzzle game on a new console. When that new game is also going to share the name of the greatest puzzle video game of all time, however, that just piles on the pressure to an inordinate degree. This was the dilemma faced by Canadian studio H2O entertainment whose puzzle game Phear was originally planned for the Atari Jaguar before it was acquired by Nintendo and renamed Tetrisphere before launch. The game actually bears little resemblance to Tetris, other than the use of similar shaped tetrominoes as playing pieces. Rather than dropping these blocks into a flat 2D well, the game instead revolves (literally) around a giant ball covered in Tetris shapes. The aim is to remove these shapes by dropping more shapes onto them from a height. If your drop results in three identical shapes touching, those shapes will disappear. As you continue to do this, the sphere's shell will slowly disappear and you can eventually reach the core, which completes the level. That's the extremely basic explanation, but Tetrisphere has more complexity than that, which is maybe why it didn't quite gain the widespread appeal of its namesake. That said, those who stuck with it fell in love with it, meaning as well as being the first puzzle game on the Nintendo 64 it's also regarded as one of the best.

FACT

The game's electro soundtrack, composed by Neil Voss, is considered one of the best on the N64, and won a 'Best Soundtrack' award from *Nintendo Power* magazine.

TIGGER'S HONEY HUNT

Year 2000
Publisher NewKidCo / Ubisoft
Developer DokiDenki Studio

WINNIE THE POOH has decided he wants to throw a party for all his friends in the Hundred Acre Wood. That's the sort of fun-loving guy he is, you see. There's just one problem with this: being Winnie the Pooh he wants to be able to serve enormous quantities of honey to his guests. And being Winnie the Pooh, he doesn't have anywhere near enough honey in his cupboard, thanks to his own personal cravings. A Winnie the Pooh party without honey would be like a work Christmas party without a busy January for the HR department, so Tigger offers to head out and collect the honey for Pooh, given that he's generally faster at these things. Tigger's Honey Hunt is similar to Tarzan, and not just because it's a Nintendo 64 take on a Disney property. It's also a 2.5D platformer which doesn't do anything dramatically revolutionary but nevertheless provides a solid enough experience that should appear to younger players. As well as the platforming stages, players can also take on three mini-games based on Simon Says, Rock Paper Scissors and, um… Poohsticks. Don't be too alarmed, it's basically just throwing sticks in a river and racing them. Tigger's Honey Hunt was also released on the PlayStation and PC, but while those versions contained voice acting the size limitations of the N64 cartridge meant these were replaced with dialogue text boxes, making it slightly less accessible to younger players who may not be able to read them well. ■

FACT

Tigger wasn't in the first Winnie the Pooh book. He didn't originally appear until *The House at Pooh Corner* was released two years later in 1928, where Pooh and friends try to find a food he likes eating (turns out he likes malt extract).

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX

Year 1999
Publisher Red Storm Entertainment
Developer Red Storm Entertainment / Saffire

THE RAINBOW SIX series has become so complex over the years that it's often difficult to figure out what (if anything) author Tom Clancy – who died in 2013 – has to do with the games and their storylines these days. That wasn't always the case, however, especially when it came to the first Rainbow Six title. The game was developed by Red Storm Entertainment, a studio set up by Clancy himself to create video games based on his books. Although it enjoyed modest success with games like Politika and Dominant Species, Rainbow Six was the studio's first huge hit, due to the way it took the first-person shooter genre and injected a heavy dose of tactical planning to it. While games like Doom and Quake had players sprinting through each level and blasting everything to smithereens, Rainbow Six was instead an extremely delicate affair with missions requiring plenty of strategy, patience and tactical awareness. Players, enemies and hostages can all die with just one or two shots, meaning going in all guns blazing is a surefire way of meeting Saint Peter sooner than expected. Instead, players have to make use of their full squad and make sure that each task is approached in a careful manner. Rainbow Six brought a refreshingly strategic approach to the genre, gaining it an instant following, and the series continues to this day, albeit in a significantly more enhanced and complicated form. ■

FACT

There have been nine games in the Rainbow Six series, the latest of which (at the time of writing) is 2022's Rainbow Six Extraction, which has teams working together to fight parasitic aliens.

TOM AND JERRY IN FISTS OF FURRY

Year 2000
Publisher NewKidCo / Ubisoft
Developer VIS Entertainment

AMAZINGLY, THE NINTENDO 64 had not one but two Power Stone knock-offs based on cartoon franchises. A year before The Powerpuff Girls got their own take on Capcom's Dreamcast fighter, the same treatment was given to Tom and Jerry, everyone's favourite cat and mouse duo (sorry, The Simpsons, I said everyone's). Fists of Furry takes place over 10 different stages, each with a suitably cheesy and pun-based title. Cooking Up a Storm, for example, takes place in a kitchen, while The Mice Before Christmas is set in a mansion during the festive period. As in Power Stone, characters can freely run around wherever they like in each stage, and there are a variety of weapons for them to grab and use. If you're fighting in the garden, you can launch the likes of flower pots, bird baths and benches at enemies, while a stage set on a cruise ship lets you throw deck chairs and wine bottles at them, or grab a swordfish and use it as a melee weapon. Although the game initially starts you off with only Tom or Jerry to choose from, as you play through it you get to unlock other characters from the series, including Spike and Tyke Bulldog, Duckling, Nibbles Mouse and Butch Cat. Fists of Furry was received relatively well by critics who praised it for being a fighting game aimed more towards younger children (albeit a generation of younger children who were still allowed to see extreme violence in their cartoons). ■

FACT

In the first 1940 Tom & Jerry cartoon, the pair were known as Jasper and Jinx. There was later a contest to rename them, and animator John Carr won $50 for coming up with Tom & Jerry.

TONIC TROUBLE

Year 1999
Publisher Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft Montreal

AS IMPRESSIVE AS Rayman 2 was, it wasn't actually Ubisoft's first attempt at making a 3D platformer. Tonic Trouble was in fact the publisher's initial project, but it suffered a number of delays which meant it ended up releasing at roughly the same time as Rayman 2. The game tells the story of Ed, an alien who works as a janitor on a spaceship. Ed finds a strange fluid during one of his shifts and decides to drink it (as you do), but quickly discovering it tastes awful he spits it out. It turns out the fluid is a magic formula that causes anything it touches to come to life, so Ed decides to discreetly dump the can down a nearby garbage chute. Unfortunately, this in turn sends the liquid hurtling to Earth, causing carnage. As punishment for his carelessness, Ed has to travel to Earth to clean up his mess. Like Rayman 2, Tonic Trouble starts its protagonist off with a limited array of moves and lets the player gain new abilities as they progress through the adventure. Over time Ed gains the likes of a peashooter, a diving helmet which lets him explore underwater, and a pogo stick which lets him cross over lava. Tonic Trouble may have been a straightforward platformer but its charm and interesting plot made it worth playing anyway, even if it would be overshadowed by Rayman 2's subsequent release two months later. ■

FACT

By the time it first appeared in magazine previews under the title Ed, the game had already been renamed eight times during development.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

Year	2000
Publisher	Activision
Developer	Edge of Reality

TONY HAWK'S PRO Skater is one of those rare games that not only deliver a fantastic experience but create an entirely new genre altogether in the process. There had obviously been plenty of skateboarding games before Pro Skater, with the likes of 720, Skate or Die and more recently ESPN Extreme Games on the PlayStation satisfying skateboarding fans to an extent. The first Tony Hawk game, however, completely revolutionised not only the world of video game skateboard games, but also the way people looked at the actual real world sport itself.

The game's main focus is on the art of performing tricks. After choosing from a series of open stages, players are given two minutes to freely roam around, performing as many different tricks as they can in that time limit. There are three main trick types in the first Tony Hawk's Pro Skater: flips (where you quickly flip the board under you in mid-air), grabs (where you hold the board and strike a pose in mid-air) and grinds (where you land on a rail or lip and balance along it). By pulling together as many of these as possible and combining them with mid-air spins – while also ensuring a variety of tricks are being performed instead of the same one over and over again – players can build huge scores.

Each stage also provides players with five different goals that have to be ticked off in order to truly complete the game (and also to unlock further stages). While these obviously include high score challenges they also include others which encourage exploration of the stage, such as collecting five letters that spell out S-K-A-T-E and finding a hidden VHS tape (which shows the age of the game).

FACT

There are two bizarre cheat codes which, when entered on the pause screen, permanently display photos of two women on the screen until you quit to the main menu. It's claimed that one of them was Hawk's wife at the time but this is unconfirmed.

While Tony Hawk himself was undoubtedly the star of the show – after all, it's his name on the bloody thing – such was the impact of the game that the rest of the supporting cast, made up of Tony's friends and fellow skaters, became household names in their own right, The likes of Chad Muska, Elissa Steamer and Kareem Campbell became significantly more well-known in the wake of the game's release, and it's not an exaggeration to say that the entire sport of skateboarding took on an entirely new lease of life as a result of its success. Suddenly a sport that was considered by some to be an '80s craze that was starting to flatline was now the freshest and coolest thing all over again, and this game played an enormous part in that.

Playing it today, the original game is slightly less engaging than its successors, mainly because so many of the new techniques that were introduced in later games improved the gameplay so drastically. As a result, players looking to get into the series may be best advised to try later entries, such as those shown over the page. Of course, those games would never have existed without the original, meaning Tony Hawk's Pro Skater is undoubtedly one of the most ground-breaking and important releases of the generation. ■

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

Year 2001
Publisher Activision
Developer Edge of Reality

A SEQUEL TO Tony Hawk's Pro Skater was a stone cold certainty, and sure enough Pro Skater 2 arrived shortly afterwards. While the core components were left intact, Pro Skater 2 built on them by adding new features that would ultimately make it an even more engaging game. The most notable of these has to be the introduction of the manual, a trick where players can perform a balancing trick on the board (similar to a grind) along any flat surface. Manuals allowed players to link grinds and jumps together, meaning they could now create long combos that would see them grinding across a rail, jumping off and landing into a manual, then balancing that across the ground until they reached the next rail or jump. This completely opened up the game to a new level of strategy, as players looked for the best lines they could follow to put together enormous combos. Also new to the game was a cash system where collecting cash pick-ups and performing the various goals (of which there were now far more on each stage) would allow them to not only unlock new stages but also upgrade their skaters with new stat points and moves. Pro Skater 2 improved on its predecessor in all the right ways, and as such is considered one of the greatest video games of all time, sitting on Metacritic with an obscene score of 98. ■

FACT

The N64 version looks sharper and runs smoother than the PlayStation one, but the cartridge storage limitations meant the game's famous soundtrack was reduced to eight songs, and these were short instrumental loops.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

Year 2001
Publisher Activision
Developer Edge of Reality

ALTHOUGH THE NINTENDO 64 had been discontinued by the time Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 arrived, the game was still ported to the system and as such became the last ever Nintendo 64 game released in any region. It builds even further on the mechanics of Pro Skater 2 by adding another new crucial move, the revert. Reverts can be pulled off just as players land from a vertical trick, and provide a split second where the player spins their board around, during which the player can start a manual. This means that theoretically players now could completely link an entire run as one huge combo by doing a vertical jump, reverting out of it into a manual, manualling across the ground, hitting a grind, jumping off that into a manual, heading over to another jump, reverting out of that and so on. Watching a Pro Skater 3 expert in action is like watching a glass blower. You have absolutely no idea how they're able to do that without their fingers burning off, but you can't take your eyes away from the action. Many consoles end their lifespans with a final release that's more than a little underwhelming (see Frogger on the SNES as a perfect example of this). Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 is a perfect example that these rules are made to be broken, and as the final release on the Nintendo 64 it was one hell of a strong way for the console to bow out. ■

FACT

If you can find and complete every gap in the game, you'll unlock the ability to play as X-Men character Wolverine.

TOP GEAR HYPER BIKE

Year	2000
Publisher	Kemco
Developer	Snowblind Studios

TOP GEAR HYPER Bike was the last of four Top Gear games released on the Nintendo 64, none of which have anything to do with the TV series of the same name (or, for that matter, the iconic 1960s London clothing boutique). As the name suggests, the emphasis here is on two wheels rather than four, and there are two types of bike racing on offer: dirt racing and street racing. In the main Championship mode, you alternate between the two as you try to finish as high as possible to earn enough points to qualify for the next round. Because it's a Top Gear game it doesn't go too overboard with realism, and one of the game's main mechanics is a nitro bar which can be constantly filled by performing tricks. There are 16 bikes in total, split between dirt bikes and street bikes with official licences from the likes of Kawasaki, Honda and Yamaha, as well as one unlicensed bike called the Cudati 750 (which is basically a Ducati 750). If two separate types of track isn't enough to whet your appetite, the game also has a pleasantly detailed track editor mode, which starts you off with a standard oval and lets you raise, lower and twist it to your own liking to create your dream track. As long as your dream track is a dirt one, that is: you can't make a street course with the track editor. ■

FACT

If you enter Up, Left, Right, L, Down, R on the title screen then select the Kawasaki KX80 as your bike, your racer will be replaced with a dinosaur.

TOP GEAR OVERDRIVE

Year	1998
Publisher	Kemco
Developer	Snowblind Studios

TOP GEAR HYPER Bike is all well and good, but the Top Gear series was more famous for its car racing, and Top Gear Overdrive provides that in spades. The game plays a lot like the SNES Top Gear titles, in that the player can more or less bullet through most of the tracks with the accelerator taped firmly down and the brake only coming into play in cases of extreme desperation. There are six tracks to race through, but some of them have slightly questionable names, such as Frigid Peaks and Fertile Canyon. These tracks also have variations where they can be played in a mirror mode or with extreme weather like thunder or snow. Although you start off with only two cars, you can eventually unlock more by earning cash during your races. These include the likes of a monster truck, a hot rod and a four-wheel drive car. There are also some secret vehicles, including the Nintendo Power car, which is emblazoned with decals featuring the logo of *Nintendo Power* magazine, and some significantly sillier offerings such as a giant taco with tomatoes for wheels. Accompanying all this is a rock soundtrack consisting almost entirely of music by Grindstone. And if you've never heard of Grindstone, don't worry: they split up a year or two after the game came out. A toast to Grindstone: we barely knew ye. Well, never knew ye, mostly. ■

FACT

Grindstone hailed from Portland and most of the Top Gear Overdrive soundtrack came from their self-titled debut album.

TOP GEAR RALLY

Year 1997
Publisher Midway / Kemco
Developer Boss Game Studios

THE FIRST OF four Top Gear games to be released on the Nintendo 64, Top Gear Rally was noticeably different to the previous three Top Gear titles released on the SNES. Rather than taking part in a series of city-based street races as in its predecessors, Top Gear Rally – as the name implies – instead focuses on rally racing, where players powerslide their way through tracks consisting of both dirt and asphalt surfaces. The game's main mode is Championship, where players have to make their way through six seasons each consisting of anything from two to four races. Each race starts you off in 20th place, and you have to overtake as many other drivers as you can to gain the highest position possible, for which you're rewarded with a set number of points. You have to reach a certain points target to progress to the next season, so consistency is the key. What made Top Gear Rally so well loved at the time was its realistic physics: each car has its own specific suspension engine which means each car feels different to control. Leap off a jump or a bump in the road and the car's body bounces realistically off its wheels, making for some deeply satisfying gameplay when players manage to master their vehicle and fly around the game's tracks smooth as butter. Although Top Gear Rally may not have been what long-time Top Gear fans were looking for, as a rally title it received praise across the board. ■

FACT

Legendary composer Barry Leitch provided the music for the game but called it 'probably the only N64 game to use 8-bit samples' on his website, adding that 'the audio design for this game was pretty bad'. Sounds alright to me.

TOP GEAR RALLY 2

Year 1999
Publisher Kemco
Developer Saffire

WHILE THE ORIGINAL Top Gear Rally provided top notch arcade style racing action, Kemco and the series' new developer Saffire decided to lean heavier towards realism with its sequel. Sanctioned by the American Rally Sport Group, Top Gear Rally 2 focuses on point-to-point rally courses, rather than lap-based circuits, making things feel more like a real-life rally race. It also differs from its predecessor in that it actually includes licensed cars, with the likes of Toyota, Subaru and Mitsubishi. Real-life rally racing usually doesn't just let any maniac with a Skoda plough onto the track, so certain races can only be attempted if you've already passed the ARSG rally school tests included in the game. Without their certification, you're limited to an amateur league, where the competition is weak and the rewards are low. As you get your qualifications and work your way through the game you'll be able to attract the attention of sponsors, and can then use the money they give you to buy new car parts for upgrading purposes. If you get bored with the tracks on offer, Top Gear Rally 2 also has a random track generator, which essentially acts as an early example of procedural generation in polygonal racing games, with no two races alike. Top Gear Rally 2 was certainly a game with plenty of longevity, then, even if it didn't provide the more arcade-like powersliding shenanigans that fans of the original may have preferred. ■

FACT

The game has a number of hidden messages which can be unlocked by entering codes on the main menu. One of them says: 'Brandon and Dustin, always hide your money from women cause they always spend it.'

TOY STORY 2: BUZZ LIGHTYEAR TO THE RESCUE

Year 1999
Publisher Activision
Developer Traveller's Tales

THE ORIGINAL 16-BIT Toy Story movie tie-in was considered a remarkable achievement in that it combined pre-rendered sprites (as in Donkey Kong Country) with basic polygonal background elements, all while still running at a smooth 60 frames per second. By the time Toy Story 2 came around the polygonal era had well and truly settled, however, and such gimmickry was now the norm. As a result, the Toy Story 2 game is similar to the movie in that it's less immediately ground-breaking than its predecessor but still delivers an entertaining experience regardless.

As the name suggests, the player controls Buzz Lightyear throughout the entire game, which follows the plot of the movie fairly closely with some new scenes thrown in to bulk up the adventure a little. As in the film, Buzz has to rescue Woody from Al's Toy Barn before he's sent to a toy collector in Japan, not realising that Woody's having his own adventure with his newfound friends Jessie and Bullseye. The game consists of 15 stages, split into five separate 'zones'. These cover the five main locations in the movie, starting off inside Andy's bedroom, as Buzz tries to find a way outside. The window's closed, so it's not quite that easy: a trip through the rest of the house

is required. Once you're out, it's time to search Andy's neighbourhood for Woody before eventually realising that he's been taken to Al's Toy Barn. The second section, then, has Buzz making his way through the city, with stages set in construction yards and alleyways (there's also a fight with a slime monster in a trashcan which I'm fairly certain isn't canon). Then it's onto Al's Toy Barn itself, as Buzz explores the store's various aisles, including its space toys section where he gets into a boss fight with another Buzz Lightyear who still doesn't realise he's a toy. This is followed by a trip to Al's apartment to rescue Woody, via an elevator shaft and an encounter with Buzz's arch enemy, the evil Emperor Zurg. Finally, it's off to the airport for a trip along the conveyor belts in an attempt to find the suitcase containing Woody before he's Asia-bound. And just when you think it's all over, there's a final one-on-one against Stinky Pete the Prospector.

FACT

When the game originally released, one section had Buzz facing off against little toy Mexican stereotypes wearing dodgy moustaches and bandoliers. Later shipments of the game replaced these with cowboys.

Given that it was developed by UK studio Traveller's Tales, Toy Story 2 provides solid platforming gameplay. Buzz is armed with a number of moves, including a satisfying double jump, and can use his space laser to destroy enemies and other targets. The player can also switch to a first-person targeting mode which shows Buzz's reflection on the screen, similar to the effect that would eventually be seen in Metroid Prime. I'm not saying Retro Studios got the idea from Toy Story 2, of course, I'm just saying it's a cool effect. Put that lawsuit down. ■

TRANSFORMERS: BEAST WARS TRANSMETALS

Year 1999
Publisher Takara / Bay Area Multimedia
Developer Takara / Locomotive Corporation

BEAST WARS: TRANSFORMERS was an attempt to modernise Transformers by turning them into animals. Set 300 years after the events of the original '80s cartoon series, the *Beast Wars* TV show featured the descendants of the Autobots and Decepticons, named the Maximals and Predacons (though thankfully it doesn't explain how the Transformers were able to have children).

Transformers: Beast Wars Transmetals is the second game based on the series: the first was a third-person shooter on the PlayStation, but this is instead a fighting game where the Maximals and Predacons have at it one-on-one. Each character can switch between three different modes, each with their own pros and cons. The Robot mode lets them run around on two feet, which is useful for both fighting up close in hand-to-hand combat and also firing projectiles from a distance. Vehicle mode lets them travel around extremely quickly, but projectile attacks are weak in this form. Finally, Beast mode is somewhere in the middle with relatively powerful attacks but not real projectile capability. On paper it seems that Robot mode is the most powerful, and it is: the problem is, it also drains your energy, so you have to keep switching to Beast or Vehicle mode to replenish it. There are initially eight characters to choose from – Opimus Primal, Rattrap, Cheetor, Airazor, Megatron, Tarantulas, Waspinator and Terrorsaur – with the ability to unlock a further four characters (Tigatron, Blackarachnia, Ravage and Starscream) to bring the roster up to 12. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of the game supports the Transfer Pak. If players have Duel Fight Transformers Beast Wars on the Game Boy Color, they can connect it to the Transfer Pak and unlock Megatron X in the N64 game.

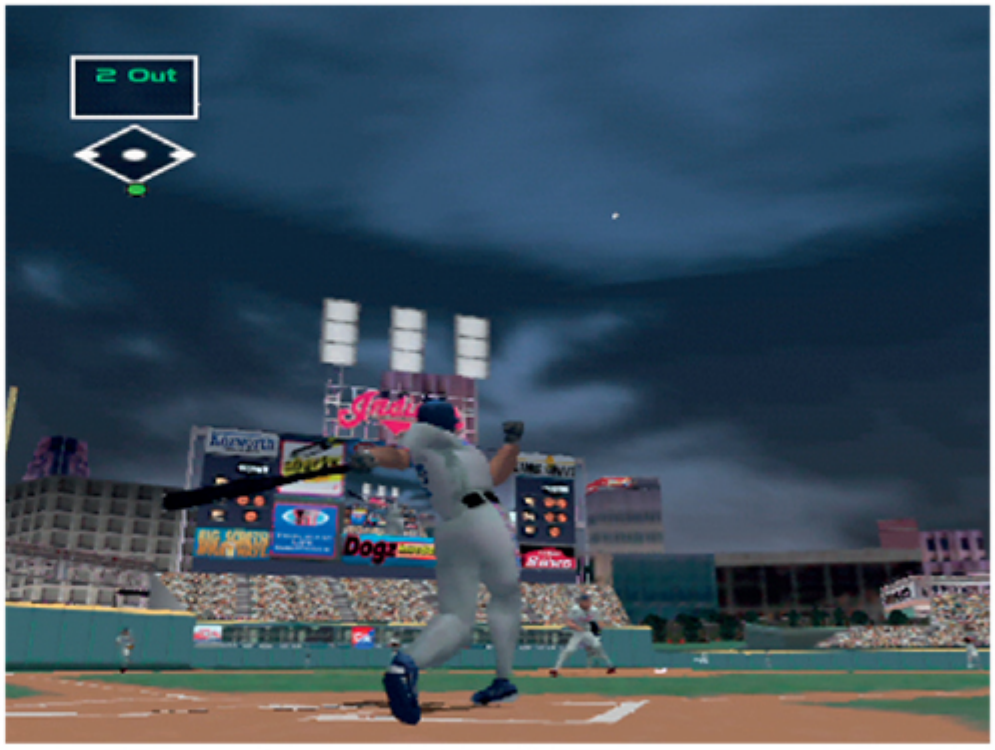
TRIPLE PLAY 2000

Year 1999
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Canada / Treyarch

TRIPLE PLAY 2000 was the fifth game in EA's Triple Play series of baseball games, and the first and only entry to be released on a Nintendo home console. Despite the lack of branding in the title, the game features the full Major League Baseball and MLBPA licences, meaning all the official team names, logos and uniforms are correct, all the players are present and accounted for and the real life stadiums are in there too (and are recreated in exceptional detail for the era). The thing that makes Triple Play 2000 stand out among the other Nintendo 64 baseball games is the dynamic camera, which kicks in during certain moments. Fielding in particular sees the camera switching to some impressive close-ups during catches and close safe or out calls, while hitting a home run drops the camera down low so you can get a better sense of scale and a more grandiose shot of the ballpark as the ball flies over the wall. Commentary is provided by Jim Hughson, who had previously provided commentary for Toronto Maple Leafs games throughout the mid '80s and early '90s. This attention to presentation detail aside, the game's options are fairly normal fare by baseball game standards, with the ability to play a single match, a full season or a home run derby, with an added player transfer mode allowing players to make any trades they see fit. ■

FACT

Although sports games usually put the next year in their title, Triple Play 2000 was released when the MLB season started in March 1999. The season ended in October, so there wasn't a single game played in 2000.



TUROK: DINOSAUR HUNTER

Year 1997
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Iguana Entertainment

ON 28 OCTOBER 1954, Dell Comics published the 596th issue of its 'Four Color' series of one-off comic book stories. Issue 596 was called *Turok: Son of Stone*, and told the story of a Native American and his young ward Andar as they both explore a cave and come out of it to find themselves in a forgotten valley populated by dinosaurs and other creatures long believed to be extinct. Turok was so popular that he would eventually get his own series, with issues released intermittently throughout the '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s, before the IP was picked up by Valiant Comics in 1992 and renamed *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*. When Acclaim purchased Valiant Comics in 1994, the wheels were set in motion for what would, in a few years' time, become the first FPS game released for the Nintendo 64.

The Turok games explains how the Turok title is passed down to the oldest male in every generation of his family. This particular Turok goes by the name of Tal'Set, and he has to protect the Lost Land, a primitive world known as the 'interdimensional sewer of the universe' where all sorts of life from time and space can be transported (mostly dinosaurs, in this case). Turok has to defend the Lost Land from the Campaigner, an evil overlord looking for an extremely powerful weapon called the Chronoscepter. The Chronoscepter has been broken into eight pieces to protect it from falling into evil hands, so Turok has to find all eight pieces and put an end to the Campaigner's nonsense before he can use it to destroy the barriers that separate the Lost Land from the rest of the universe and cause chaos.

FACT

Because Germany had strict censorship rules at the time, the German version of Turok replaced its human enemies with robotic characters.

The game's development team Iguana Entertainment was committed to throwing everything at Turok to make sure it was one of the most visually impressive early games on the Nintendo 64. The game features such techniques as real-time lighting and particle systems, while Acclaim's motion capture studio was used to give the human enemies realistic death animations. Despite all these impressive techniques, one of the features Turok wold ultimately become most notorious for would be its extensive use of fog, which Acclaim attempted to pitch as atmospheric but was in reality put in place to prevent the game needing to render too much at once.

Despite this setback, Turok was praised for being a solid early attempt at creating a unique console-only first-person shooter. While its level design was slightly confusing at times and the control system took some getting used to, there was no denying the game's atmosphere and ambition. And while its experimental nature meant it didn't quite nail everything – to this day many still curse the jumping sections, where not being able to see where you were landing led to countless cheap fails – it still stands tall as one of the most impressive early games on the Nintendo 64. ■

TUROK 2: SEEDS OF EVIL

Year	1998
Publisher	Acclaim
Developer	Iguana Entertainment

THE SEQUEL TO Turok is arguably one of the most stark examples of a game that was critically well received when it was originally released but has aged quite drastically over the years. After the events of the first game, Turok threw the Chronoscepter into a volcano so it could never be used again. Unfortunately, this wasn't the smartest thing to do and the destruction of the Chronoscepter triggered a huge earthquake that awoke the Primagen, an ancient alien creature that created the Lost Land in the first place after he was trapped in his spacecraft trying to witness the Big Bang (look, just go with it). The newly awakened Primagen uses his telepathic powers to contact a bunch of primitive races and tells them to send their dark forces to the Lost Lands to destroy the five energy totems there. Once these are wrecked, the Primagen will be released, and the universe itself will be shattered.

Time for Turok to save the day, um… except for the small matter that the Primagen took so long to wake up that Turok is now dead. The name has now passed down to his descendant Joshua Fireseed, who is summoned by Adon, the speaker of Forever Light, who explains the situation and gives him a task that's surprisingly straightforward given how convoluted the plot is: find all five energy totems, kill all the enemies who've been sent to wreck it, then find the Primagen himself and destroy him.

FACT

If you think the title Seeds of Evil is a bit weak, you may want to import the Japanese version which has the incredible title Violence Killer: Turok New Generation.

Turok 2 is one of the first games to use the Expansion Pak, which means it runs at a significantly better resolution than its predecessor. While this led to a lot of praise for its sharp, detailed visuals, it also sparked a lot of criticism for its frame rate, which significantly tanked in numerous areas and is the main reason a number of modern players find it somewhat less enjoyable to play these days. Its drawbacks aside, one of the most memorable aspects of Turok 2 is the addition of a range of new weapons, including the series' most infamous gadget, the Cerebral Bore. This fires a homing projectile which latches onto an enemy's head, drills into their skull and spurts out all their brain fluid before exploding, blowing their head up into tiny pieces in a manner that both looks and sounds delightfully unpleasant.

Turok 2 also introduced multiplayer to the series for the first time, allowing up to four players to compete against each other. Unlike GoldenEye 007, the characters in Turok 2's multiplayer each have their own strengths and weaknesses: some are faster than others, some have more powerful close-range attacks, and some can regenerate health over time. One of its more comical modes is Frag Tag, where one player is turned into a small monkey with very little health and has to find a certain point in the map before they're killed. If they can manage to reach it, they transform into their normal form and a different player is turned into the monkey. ■

TUROK 3: SHADOW OF OBLIVION

Year 2000
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Acclaim Studios Austin

AFTER MIXING THINGS up a bit with Rage Wars (see below), Acclaim decided to give Turok fans a third and final main N64 entry in the series. It turns out that by saving the world at the end of Turok 2, Joshua actually triggered the complete eradication of the universe. A monstrous entity called Oblivion needs to kill the Turok lineage to become reborn and end all existence, but as his henchmen try to kill Joshua in his sleep, Joshua wakes up and tells his siblings Danielle and Joseph to escape. Joshua seemingly dies, so it's now up to either Danielle or Joseph – the player gets to choose which one – to take on the mantle of the new Turok and save the day by destroying Oblivion and saving the universe. Each character has their own unique abilities: Danielle has a grappling hook and favours more direct action, whereas Joseph is better suited to stealth players with his night vision goggles allowing him to sneak around undetected. While Shadow of Oblivion was far more stable than Turok 2, offering better draw distances and an improved frame rate, some were disappointed that the series had evolved so much that the whole concept of hunting dinosaurs had become completely lost. What's more, with games like Perfect Dark now available on the console, Turok 3 had a lot more competition and struggled as a result. ■

FACT

The Turok series continued with the prequel Turok: Evolution on PS2, Xbox and GameCube, followed by a PS3 and XBox 360 reboot in 2008.

TUROK: RAGE WARS

Year 1999
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Acclaim Studios Austin

AS TUROK 2 was in development, developer Iguana was frustrated that many of its plans for the multiplayer mode wouldn't be implemented in time for the game's release. To remedy this, the team – now renamed Acclaim Studios Austin – followed up with Turok: Rage Wars, a spin-off title designed entirely with multiplayer in mind (similar to the likes of Quake III Arena and Unreal Tournament). Naturally, the game has support for up to four players, and if you can't get enough friends around you can turn on AI bots to make up the numbers. At first there are only three characters to choose from – Turok himself (specifically Joshua from Turok 2), Adon and an Elite Guard – but by taking on the game's single-player mode you can unlock various other characters, bringing the roster up to a total of 13. The single player mode isn't a proper campaign like you would get in the other Turok games, but is instead a series of missions where players take on a bunch of different deathmatches and other game modes, while engaging in occasional boss battles along the way. Rage Wars, then, ended up being this strange halfway house which promised a full focus on multiplayer but instead, some argued, made too many compromises to keep everyone happy. While the focus on deathmatches obviously wouldn't be enough for players craving a solo campaign, the need to play through the game in single player to unlock multiplayer characters wasn't ideal for groups of friends either. ■

FACT

The vast majority of North American cartridges (black-coloured ones) have a bug that makes it impossible to win the two-player Frag Tag trial and earn the medal for it. This was fixed in grey replacement cartridges sent out to anyone who complained.

TWISTED EDGE EXTREME SNOWBOARDING

Year 1998
Publisher Midway / Kemco
Developer Boss Game Studios

AFTER THE SUCCESS of Top Gear Rally it was decided that developer Boss Games would next try its hand at a snowboarding game, in an attempt to challenge Nintendo's upcoming 1080° Snowboarding. Twisted Edge Extreme Snowboarding – which is missing the 'Extreme' from its title in Europe, because apparently we couldn't handle that much excitement – lets players choose between four characters (with four more unlockable ones) and take on six different courses. These range from the fairly straight Easy Slider to the slightly misleading Funky Town, which is neither funky nor is it a town: it's more of a standard slope which has something like eight houses near the bottom. Characters are pleasantly stereotypical, each with their own slightly questionable soundbites: there's Ganz from Germany ('Ja, let's ride'), Silvia from France ('Oui, merci'), Ryo from Japan (screaming something in Japanese) and Kevin from the USA ('Shredder, baby'). The main mode is Competition, where you can take on Novice, Intermediate and Expert circuits, while there's also a Stunt Challenge mode where players pull off as many tricks as possible. While it isn't necessarily a terrible game by any means, the main problem Twisted Edge had was that its release was delayed: despite appearing in magazine previews with a March 1998 release date, it ended up releasing in North America in November 1998 instead (and didn't reach Europe until March 1999). By that point, 1080° Snowboarding had already been released and Twisted Edge looked lesser by comparison, extreme or otherwise. ■

FACT

Things could have been noticeably more confusing had Nintendo stuck with its original planned title for 1080° Snowboarding, which was Vertical Edge Snowboarding.

V-RALLY: EDITION '99

Year 1998
Publisher Infogrames / Spike
Developer Eden Studios

FRENCH PUBLISHER INFOGRAMES originally released V-Rally on the PlayStation in July 1997, before following up with a Nintendo 64 port a year and a half later in Europe (North America didn't get it until September 1999). The game is one of the more serious rally titles on the console, though there's still an option to race with other cars on the same track as you. There are 15 officially licensed cars in the game, split into three categories: WRC (which are four-wheel drive rally cars), Kit Cars (which are two-wheel drive) and some unlockable Extra Cars. The WRC cars take in the usual manufacturers you'd expect in a rally game, like Subaru, Ford, Lancia, Toyota and Mitsubishi. As for courses, there are an impressive 50 to choose from: these are divided into eight regions, each with their own distinct visual style (Indonesia, England, Spain, Corsica, New Zealand, French Alps, Sweden and the oddly vague 'Safari'). The game consists of two main modes: Championship acts most like a typical rally game, with players taking on each location one at a time and racing through each of their stages, trying to log a better time than their opponents. Arcade mode, meanwhile, simply gives the players a series of races and they have to reach the end before a timer runs out. V-Rally was praised for offering a faithful recreation of the sport, though sadly a planned N64 port of the sequel V-Rally 2 was never completed. ■

FACT

The game wasn't released in America until nine months after the European version. This annoyed *IGN*, who said it 'appears to become less finished by the month'. Meanwhile, in Europe nearly every other game at the time arrived months later than the US.

VIGILANTE 8

Year 1999
Publisher Activision
Developer Luxoflux

VIGILANTE 8 IS a spiritual successor of sorts to Interstate 76, Activision's PC-only vehicular combat game. The game is set in an alternative version of 1975 in which a foreign multinational oil consortium called OMAR wants to create an oil monopoly in the US, and so decides to hire a terrorist called Sid Burn to destroy all the other oil companies. Upon learning this, a trucker called Convoy forms a group called the Vigilantes, who have one mission: to head out and put an end to Sid Burn's plan by taking out his gang the Coyotes along the way.

Anyone who's played the Twisted Metal games on the PlayStation should know what to expect from Vigilante 8. Players choose from a selection of colourful characters, each with their own unique vehicle, and can choose between either the Vigilantes or the Coyotes depending on their leanings. The afro-sporting John Torque, for example, drives a 1969 Jefferson 'pimpmobile', while the rather hefty Beeswax drives a similarly large pickup truck. Each vehicle has a machine gun but can also add extra weaponry, including the likes of mines, rockets and homing missiles, as well as special weapons unique to them. Each character also has their own ending, encouraging multiple playthroughs, and the Nintendo 64 version has an exclusive extra stage called Super Dreamland 64, which is set in a comedy fantasy land with knights roaming around. ■

FACT

An HD remake called Vigilante 8 Arcade was released digitally on the Xbox 360 in 2008. It played like the original but added a few elements from its sequel and offered online multiplayer.

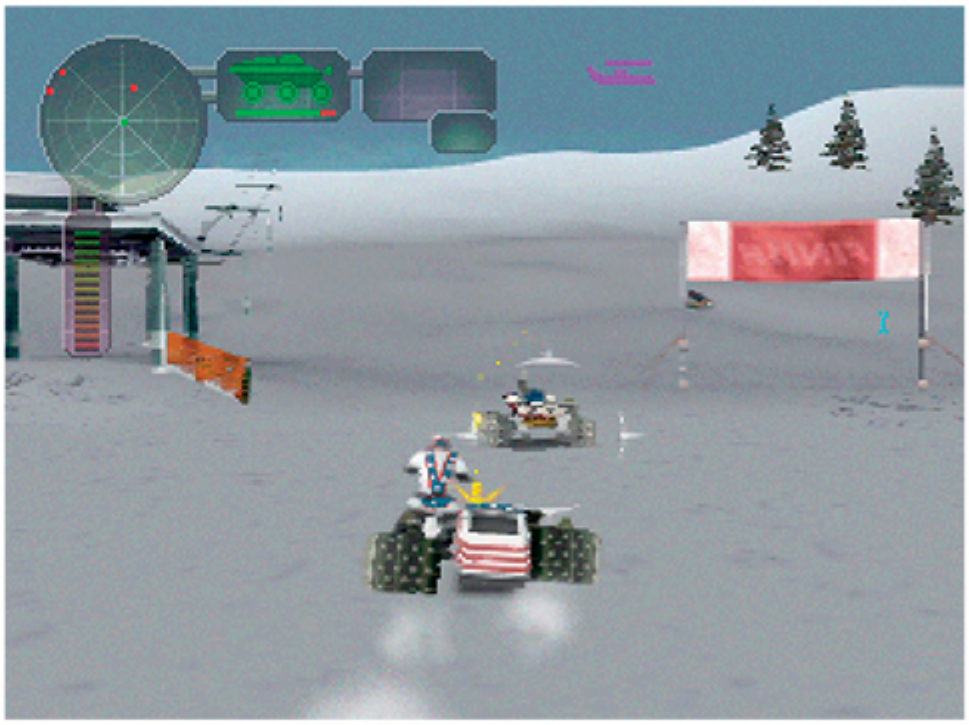
VIGILANTE 8: 2ND OFFENSE

Year 2000
Publisher Activision
Developer Luxoflux

AS IF THE idea of a car-based deathmatch game set in the '70s wasn't offbeat enough, the sequel to Vigilante 8 decided to kick things up a notch with a significantly more ridiculous plot. After the Coyotes were taken down in the first game, OMAR continued to have a stronghold on the world's petrol market, even if it wasn't the complete monopoly it had originally hoped for. The Coyotes' new leader Slick Clyde has become the new leader of OMAR, but as he approaches death in the year 2017, he looks back on his life and is disappointed he wasn't able to conquer America. To fix this, he breaks into Stanford University's quantum physics lab and steals their prototype time machines, then travels back to 1977 in an attempt to kill off the Vigilantes and secure that monopoly for OMAR after all. 2nd Offense plays similarly to the first game but adds a few new characters, bringing the roster up from eight to 12. The most notable new addition, though, is a new salvage points system where players can collect resources from enemies they've destroyed and use them to improve their own vehicle stats. The more salvage points you get, the more your car also changes visually, adding a customisation element to proceedings. Although it was well received, 2nd Offense would be the last game in the Vigilante 8 series, with Activision deciding to draw a line under it due to poor sales. ■

FACT

Despite the title, there weren't actually eight vigilantes in the game: that just referred to the number of playable characters (good and bad). Similarly, the working title for 2nd Offense was Vigilante 12.



VIRTUAL CHESS 64

Year 1998
Publisher Titus Software
Developer Titus France

CHESS VIDEO GAMES often get a bad rap because it's rare that such a visually simplistic game can be presented in such a way that can be considered deserving of what is often a price much higher than a standard chess board would cost. Even the promise of playing against an AI opponent isn't enough for some, given that small electronic chess games can be found for a fraction of the price. Virtual Chess 64 attempts to address these issues by including a few interesting features. The first is an interactive tutorial which teaches players how to play chess. This 10-part lesson takes players through the basics, explaining how all the chess pieces work, then goes on to give players scenarios and tasks them with trying to figure out how to solve them using their newfound knowledge. Once players feel confident enough to take on the CPU (naturally, there's a two-player option too), they can choose either 2D or 3D boards to play on. If you play on a 3D board, when a piece is captured the game loads up an animation, showing the characters they represent battling each other, with one dying in a 'comic' manner. This isn't completely novel – Battle Chess did it many years earlier, and arguably did it better – but it was at least an attempt to liven things up a bit. Ultimately, though, most players turned off the animations after a while and just stuck with frivolity-free contests against what was a surprisingly tough AI. ■

FACT

The AI powering the game had previously won the 1996 and 1997 World Microcomputer Chess Championships and the 1995 Harvard Cup.

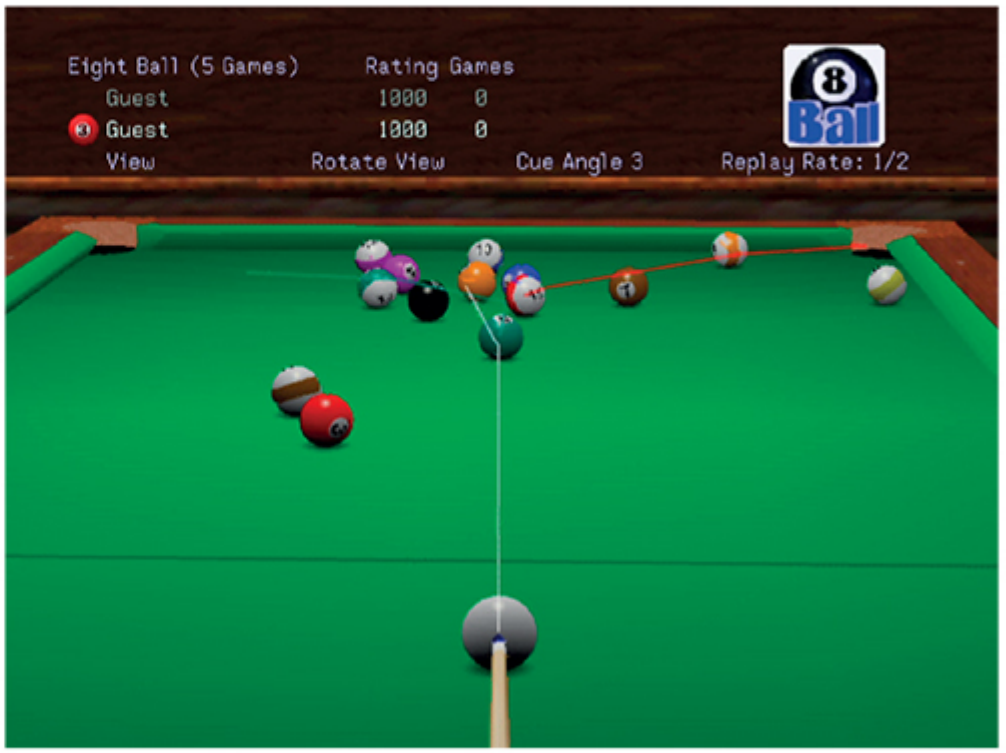
VIRTUAL POOL 64

Year 1998
Publisher Crave Entertainment
Developer Celeris

VIRTUAL POOL 64 was the fourth game in developer Celeris's Virtual Pool series, and only the second to be released on a console. The game is a realistic take on the sport, offering 11 different types of pool. As well as your conventional eight-ball and nine-ball pool modes – the latter offering American bar rules, English pub rules or APA rules – players can also choose between three-ball, six-ball, 10-ball, straight pool, rotation, one-pocket, and bank pool. With each of these rulesets, players can choose to play a single match, a tournament consisting of four, eight or 16 players, or 'shark skins', where you have to clear three, six then nine balls in as few strokes as possible. There are also three different skill levels you can play at – amateur, professional and championship – which not only affect the AI's difficulty but also the size of the table and pockets. If that all seems a bit too formal for you there's also a freestyle mode where you can simply set the table up however you like and smack some balls around like some sort of pool table-owning rebel. There are three different types of pool room to play in: a 'corner' (which is basically a pool table sitting in someone's spare room), a back room and the 'Hog Pen' (which resembles someone's 'man cave'). This is the only real level of customisation to what is a fairly dry pool game, albeit one that offered impressively accurate physics for the time. ■

FACT

If you're wondering what the difference is between British and American pool, it's the typical 'everything's bigger in the States' rule: the table, balls and cue tips are all larger in American pool.



WAIALAE COUNTRY CLUB: TRUE GOLF CLASSICS

Year	1998
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	T&E Soft

NOT TO BE confused with True Golf Classics: Waialae Country Club on the SNES, this N64 offering which clearly has a completely different title is nonetheless set at the same golf course: the titular Waialae Country Club in Honolulu, Hawaii. The course itself is a bunker-ridden par 72 championship course which borrows from a number of other famous world courses: its 10th hole, for example, is similar to the 17th hole in the legendary St Andrews course in Scotland. This Nintendo 64 rendition features the Waialae course and nothing else, meaning once you've mastered its 18 holes there's really not a lot more for you to see. That said, the game does its best to make the most of what it has by offering as many modes as it can, including the option to play the course in either stroke play, skins play, match play, practice play, tournament play or even the whole Waialae Open: a four-day tournament with no handicaps. There are 10 preset characters in the game, but while their names can be edited you can only choose between four different appearances, because each of the golfers in the game is digitised Mortal Kombat-style, (as are their caddies). You can also choose your golfer's style, meaning if you tag them as a power player, their technique will be terrible but they'll whack the ball a fair amount, whereas a wind player can shoot solid shots and isn't affected by strong gusts. ■

FACT

The Waialae Country Club has been the home of the Hawaiian Open (now known as the Sony Open in Hawaii) since the event's inception in 1965. The 2018 event was disrupted by a false emergency alert about an approaching missile attack on Hawaii.

WAR GODS

Year	1997
Publisher	Midway / GT Interactive
Developer	Midway / Eurocom

MIDWAY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH fighting games will always be immediately associated with Mortal Kombat, but that wasn't the only one-on-one fighting series the studio was responsible for. War Gods was released in arcades in 1996 and was ported to the N64 the following year, and while it bears a number of similarities to Mortal Kombat, it was actually created by a completely separate team. The game has a suitably silly plot, in which a long time ago a spaceship carrying precious ore crashed on Earth. Then different humans each find part of the ore over time and are transformed into War Gods(™). With great power comes great greed, however, and now all the War Gods have come together to kick the crap out of each other, in the hope of owning all ten chunks of ore and becoming the ultimate War God. Although the game isn't related to Mortal Kombat in any way, War Gods still borrows liberally from it with a similar 'two punches, two kicks' fighting system and the addition of fatality moves. It also makes use of digitised characters, although War Gods takes a different approach to Mortal Kombat by creating polygonal characters and texture mapping real photos onto them, a process Midway called Digital Skin. This is far from the greatest fighting game ever made, but it's worth a look if only to see CY-5, an android character who looks like the world's cheapest Terminator cosplayer. ■

FACT

There is at least one Mortal Kombat connection in War Gods: the facial textures for the characters Vallah and Warhead were provided by the models who played Sonya Blade and Shao Kahn in the early Mortal Kombat games.

WAVE RACE 64

Year	1996
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo EAD

WHEN NINTENDO WAS originally considering which of its franchises it should give the polygonal treatment on the Nintendo 64, it's probably fair to guess that Game Boy jetski title Wave Race wasn't one of them. However, when one of Nintendo's programmers was messing around with the new console's 3D technology and created a tech demo showing how the console could create realistic waves, Shigeru Miyamoto loved it so much he immediately asked if there was a way to do something with the tech, and so Wave Race 64 became a reality.

At first glance the game is your typical racer, in which players choose a jetski and take on opponents in a series of races. In practice, however, each race has an extra twist that demands precision rather than simply putting the foot down and ploughing through each course. Circuits are full of red and yellow buoys, and players have to pass them on the right and left side respectively in a sort of slalom style. Every time you pass a buoy, your jetski's power increases. The higher its power the faster it goes, but obviously the faster you get the harder it is to twist between the buoys. If you miss one your power resets back to zero and your top speed takes a hit. Even worse, if you miss five in total, you're instantly disqualified from the race (a tip: if you've run a perfect race and there's only a couple left, just be a maniac and go straight for the finish).

The game has a Championship mode which consists of Normal, Hard, Expert and Reverse categories. There's also a Time Trial mode where you can log your own times without hassle from other racers, and a Stunt mode where you're scored depending on how well you pass through rings and perform stunts. That's all well and good, but what sets Wave Race 64 apart isn't its racing mechanics or its game modes: it's the game's water physics, which were phenomenal for the time and continue to feel satisfying more than a quarter of a century later. Players had really seen nothing like Wave Race 64's water at that point in the history of video games, and it wasn't just the way it looked but the way it behaved. Much like 1080° Snowboarding would later introduce players to different types of snow and the way it affected handling, Wave Race's courses all had different types of water, some of which featured huge waves which would throw your jetski all over the place and eventually could be mastered in an immensely satisfying way.

It's a testament to the quality of Wave Race 64 that even all these decades later the game remains extremely fun to play, and while there been subsequent attempts at jetski racing games (including its own sequel on the GameCube) there will be some who maintain that Wave Race 64 remains the pinnacle on any console, regardless of the visual leaps that have since been made. ■

FACT

If you select Stunt Mode and race on Dolphin Park, and can pull off every trick in the game before the race ends, you'll hear a dolphin squeak. Now if you hold Down while choosing your jetski you'll be riding a dolphin instead.

WAYNE GRETZKY'S 3D HOCKEY

Year 1996
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Atari Games

QUICK, HERE'S A quiz and don't let the name of the game being discussed here put you off. What was the first ever four-player game on the Nintendo 64? Mario Kart? Star Fox 64? Nope! It was in fact Wayne Gretzky's… oh right, never mind, you already figured it out. Yes, as the fifth game originally released for the Nintendo 64 in the west, Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey was also the first to make use of all four of those controller ports on the front of the console. The sequel to SNES title Wayne Gretzky and the NHLPA All-Stars, 3D Hockey is more arcade-like in nature and is probably the closest you'd get to an ice hockey version of NBA Jam on the N64. The game contains all 26 NHL teams, each containing 17 real life NHLPA players, and players can choose between three-on-three, four-on-four or five-on-five games on either 'arcade size' or regulation size ice hockey rinks. A full 82-game season mode is also available, but if things are starting to sound a bit too sensible here, please do bear in mind that this is a game that boasts power shots which can either send the goalie flying or cause the net to ignite into flames. As the first sports game on the Nintendo 64, Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey was generally praised as a great starting point for four-player games on the console. ■

FACT

The Nintendo 64 version of the game was originally going to have Mortal Kombat style fatalities after fights broke out, but Midway (perhaps wisely) ditched this idea.

WAYNE GRETZKY'S 3D HOCKEY 98

Year 1997
Publisher Midway / GT Interactive
Developer Software Creations

IT'S OFTEN SAID that annual sports games are just the same as the previous year's game, with no real changes made. This is often an unfair claim, as most sports games by the likes of EA and 2K Sports do at least try to offer either new modes or change the gameplay to a certain degree to ensure some sort of improvement over the previous year's title. Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey 98, however, is one of those rare examples where you can actually fairly accuse it of not doing enough to justify a repurchase, because other than a few minor tweaks to the AI it's essentially the same game as the first 3D Hockey. Naturally, the rosters have been updated, and the goalie AI has been improved to ensure they let fewer shots in (almost to a fault, though, according to some critics who claimed it made the game too difficult). Other than that, though, the only other major additions are cheat codes which let you unlock four classic teams: the Quebec Nordiques, the Hartford Whalers, the Minnesota North Stars and the Winnipeg Jets. If the idea of playing as old defunct teams pumps you up then '98 is the one to go for, otherwise most players would be perfectly happy with the original game, meaning the one to get is basically the one you can find cheapest to buy these days. ■

FACT

The Nordiques, Whalers, North Stars and Jets all relocated in the '90s and became the Colorado Avalanche, Carolina Hurricanes, Dallas Stars and Phoenix Coyotes respectively.

WCW BACKSTAGE ASSAULT

Year	2000
Publisher	Electronic Arts
Developer	Kodiak Interactive

WHAT ARE THE key components for a wrestling match? Obviously you need your wrestlers. You need to have the rules – otherwise you'll never have a winner – and you need to have a wrestling ring, right? Well, according to WCW Backstage Assault, at least one of those things isn't entirely necessary (and it isn't the wrestlers). Backstage Assault, then, takes the rather bizarre stance of being one of the very few wrestling games ever made that doesn't actually have a wrestling ring anywhere in it.

Instead, the game focuses solely on hardcore matches taking place in backstage areas. There are 10 of these locations in all: a truck area, a loading dock, the storage bay, the boiler room, the locker room, the parking lot, the media room, the exercise room and two bathrooms. Each area has their own bespoke weapons and hazards which can be used to your advantage to do extra damage to your opponent. Toss an opponent into one of the flaming oil drums in the truck area, for example, and you'll briefly set them on fire. Do enough damage to your opponent in quick succession and they'll fall dazed to the ground, at which point an 'aerial opportunity' message may appear. When this happens, you can climb on various objects to reach a higher level and perform a diving attack on your helpless foe.

FACT

Three months after Backstage Assault was released, WCW's assets were bought over by the WWF, making this the last WCW game ever released.

The roster initially consists of 25 wrestlers, which includes a strange mix of obvious choices (Goldberg, Sting, Hulk Hogan, Kevin Nash and Ric Flair are obviously in there) and bizarrely left-field ones like manager Jimmy Hart and head of security Doug Dillinger. As you play through the game's main Hardcore Challenge mode – where you take on a series of wrestlers until you're challenged by the champion – you're given a bunch of hints for different tasks to perform during each fight. If you can pull these off, you'll unlock a new wrestler or arena. In the truck area, for example, if you can set an opponent on fire as described above you'll unlock Vampiro. Other hidden wrestlers include the likes of Bret Hart and Rey Mysterio Jr, as well as more oddball offerings like show writer and occasional performer Vince Russo, Diamond Dallas Page's wife Kimberly and Randy Savage's wife Miss Elizabeth (so you can finally have that parking lot wife-on-wife match you should definitely have never wanted).

Backstage Assault was ultimately criticised heavily by critics and players alike: not only for the obvious lack of ring but also for its slightly clunky controls and the strange fact that the wrestlers and environments looked noticeably worse than those of its predecessor WCW Mayhem (which you can see by comparing the screens on this page and the next one). I've always had a bit of a soft spot for it, but don't take my word for it because I'm certainly in the minority. ■

WCW MAYHEM

Year	1999
Publisher	Electronic Arts
Developer	Kodiak Interactive

AS YOU'LL SOON see on the following pages, THQ and WCW were a great team in the early Nintendo 64 days, releasing the fantastic WCW vs nWo World Tour and WCW/nWo Revenge. When THQ jumped ship to the WWF, however, WCW found itself looking for another publisher to team up with. A deal was done with Electronic Arts, which took over the WCW licence, and the first result of this new alliance was WCW Mayhem.

The game's main selling point is its enormous roster, which at the time was bigger than anything seen in a WCW title. There are 56 wrestlers to choose from here, covering the entire depth of the WCW locker room. The big names are all obviously in there, even including a few wrestlers who'd left the company a few months earlier (such as Chris Jericho and Steve McMichaels). The roster even expanded out to the less conventional corners of the WCW staff, including legendary ring announcer Mean Gene Okerlund, and Buddy Lee Parker, otherwise known as Sarge, the no-nonsense trainer of the WCW Power Plant wrestling academy.

The PlayStation version of WCW Mayhem featured commentary by Tony Schiavone and Bobby the Brain Heenan, but the Nintendo 64 version's limited storage space meant it lacked Heenan's lines, which made for some confusing listening on occasion when Schiavone addressed Heenan to no response. Mayhem was also the first major wrestling game to allow fights to spill into the backstage areas: in fact, it had just as many backstage areas as its sequel Backstage Assault (seen previously) and looked better on top of that, meaning Mayhem already did everything Backstage Assault did and more.

FACT

A sequel called WCW Mayhem 2 was in development, with EA enlisting AKI to work its magic. When WWF bought WCW this killed the game, and EA got AKI to make Def Jam Vendetta with its engine instead.

One of the more unique features of the game was a pay-per-views code system. As real-life pay-per-views approached, WCW programming on TV would share a special code that players could enter in their copy of Mayhem. By putting in this somewhat complex code, players could unlock the actual card for that pay-per-view and replicate the matches involved. This only lasted for a few months, however, as the game's roster started to become outdated and it was becoming impossible to replicate each fight card with the wrestlers available.

WCW Mayhem got a bad rap at the time, mainly because of what had come before it. The fact was that the game could never hope to live up to the same level of quality as the THQ WCW games, and no matter what Mayhem was it was always going to be compared in a negative light. With the benefit of hindsight decades later, it's actually not the worst wrestling game ever made and was actually much better at getting across the look and presentation of actual WCW TV shows. Had the THQ games never existed, it's not a stretch to suggest that it could have been considered one of the better wrestling games of the generation, especially considering the WWF games Acclaim had been putting out. But we'll get to that. ■

WCW NITRO

Year	1999
Publisher	THQ
Developer	Inland Productions

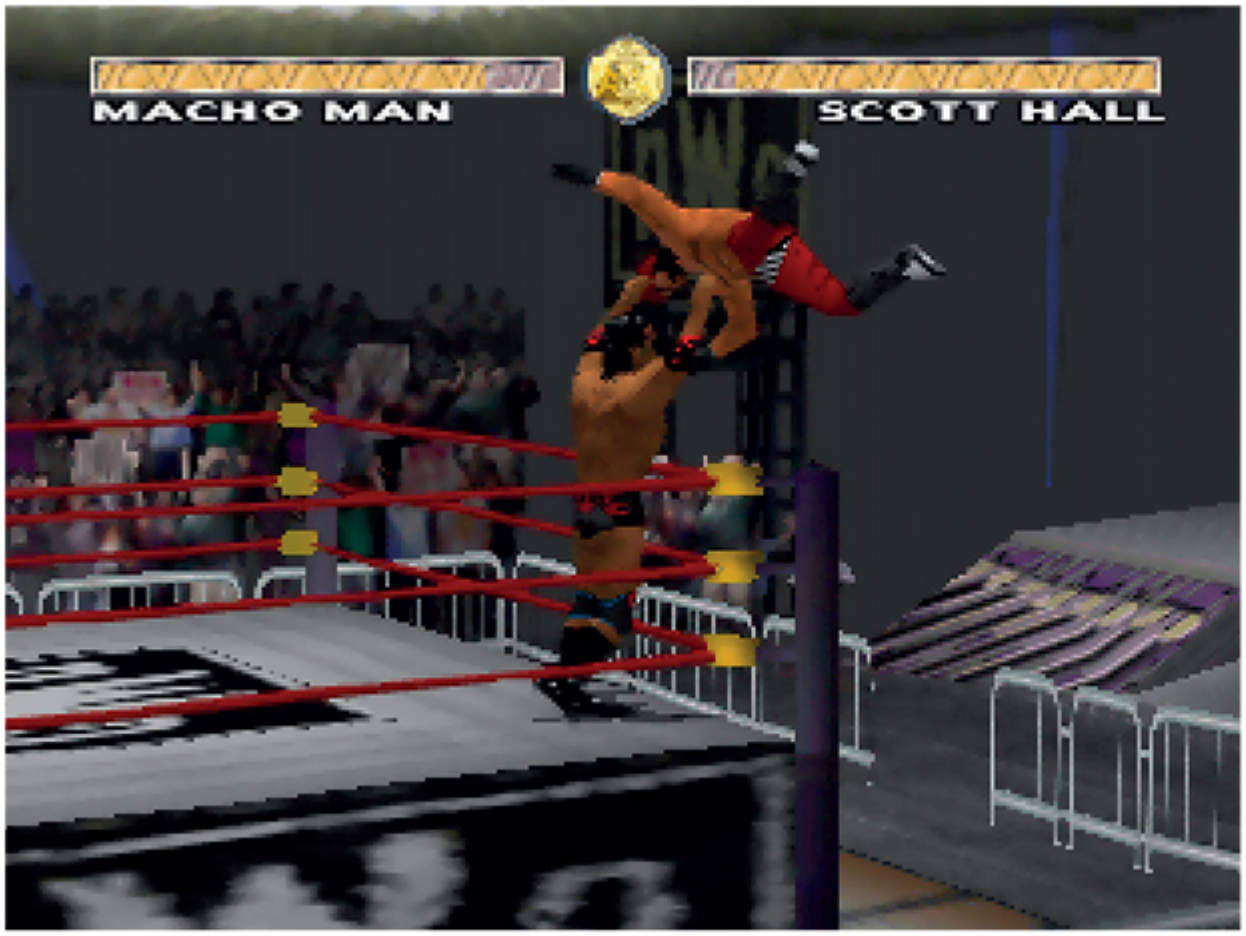
AS THQ'S DEAL with WCW neared its end before it jumped ship to the WWF, the publisher hastily decided to chuck out one more WCW-branded game just before the swap took place. WCW Nitro was actually originally released on the PlayStation in 1998, and didn't come to the Nintendo 64 until about eight months later. By the time it arrived on Nintendo's console, Nitro already had a PlayStation sequel called WCW Thunder, so to ensure N64 players didn't feel too hard done-by, their version of Nitro essentially became a mix of both games, offering the modes and playing style of the original Nitro but the updated rosters from Thunder.

The Nintendo 64 version of WCW Nitro has potentially more unlockable characters than any other wrestling game in history. There are only 16 to choose from at the start, but as you play through the game you can unlock a further 48, bringing the total roster to 64. Naturally, with a line-up that large you can't expect everyone to be a main event player, so alongside the regular big names like The Giant (who would later become The Big Show in the WWF), Diamond Dallas Page and Booker T are the likes of Horace Hogan, Ernest 'The Cat' Miller and Buff Bagwell. The game also included an extremely small handful of women wrestlers and managers, who were simply mixed into the roster alongside the male wrestlers, making things look slightly awkward when you see the 6'4', 285lb Goldberg absolutely destroying the likes of the 5'4', 115lb Miss Elizabeth with a spear and a jackhammer.

Nitro was praised for its impressive visual style for the time: the game was one of the first to use a seamless, fully texture-mapped animation system, which means that each wrestler character was wrapped with one single texture with no seams between the arms and legs. This resulted in wrestler likenesses that looked pretty realistic for the time, and combined with the impressive arena models WCW Nitro certainly looked the part. Where the game's criticism mainly stemmed from was its awkward control system, which some believed was a tad on the clunky side. Rather than having a separate grapple button, players instead have to perform moves by entering button combinations, similar to a fighting game. This made for some awkward fights and also meant players couldn't just pick up and play the game without prior research unless they didn't mind being limited to simple attacks.

FACT

There were a total of 288 episodes of *WCW Monday Nitro* between its launch in September 1995 and WWF's purchase of the company in March 2001.



Ultimately, WCW Nitro was considered a fairly average game, but this was partly because of the console it was released on. While PlayStation owners didn't really have much choice when it came to recent WCW games and were more or less stuck with Nitro and Thunder, the overwhelming success of World Tour and Revenge on the Nintendo 64 meant Nitro looked significantly worse by comparison. Given the previous highs THQ had experienced with the WCW licence on the console, it was a disappointing lull to end on before THQ jumped over to the WWF. ■

WCW VS NWO: WORLD TOUR

Year	1997	✓ ✓ ✗
Publisher	THQ	
Developer	AKI / Asmik Ace Entertainment	

ANY WRESTLING VIDEO game fan worth their salt knows all the best examples of the genre were the ones released on the Nintendo 64 and developed by AKI. While AKI's formula could be seen in an embryonic stage in Virtual Pro Wrestling and WCW vs the World on the PlayStation, it wasn't until WCW vs nWo: World Tour, its first Nintendo 64 wrestling game, that the studio completely nailed the fighting mechanics and kicked off what would ultimately become an enormously critically acclaimed run of wrestling games.

It's a testament to the quality of the series that World Tour gets so much right on AKI's first attempt on N64. The main combat system consists of strikes and grapples, which are performed with the B and A buttons respectively. Players can either tap these buttons to perform quick (but weak) attacks, or hold them down to perform more powerful attacks which, while undoubtedly more effective, take a while to wind up, telegraphing to the opponent that they're coming and making it easier to avoid them. That's where the other main element of the combat system comes into play: the L and R buttons dodge backwards and block respectively, but with perfect timing players can instead use them to reverse grapples and strikes. This can lead to an intensely tactical experience if two experienced players are competing, as they try to watch their opponents and anticipate whether a strike or grapple is coming. Watching two expert AKI wrestling game fans playing against each other and the whole thing is a fantastic dance of reversals and blocks.

FACT

A little-known secret in the game is that it's possible to rip off an opponent's mask. If you choose someone with an eye gouge move (like Ric Flair or Rick Steiner) and repeatedly perform it, it'll eventually come off.

Although WCW and NWO are on the front of the box, the roster only consists of 22 wrestlers across both factions. WCW is represented by Sting, Lex Luger, the Giant, the Steiners, Ric Flair, Ultimo Dragon, Steven Regal, Rey Mysterio Jr, Dean Malenko, Eddy Guerrero and Chris Benoit (with DDP as an unlockable character). Meanwhile, the nWo boasts Hollywood Hulk Hogan, Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, Eric Bischof, Buff Bagwell, Scott Norton, Syxx and nWo Sting (which is cheating a bit), with Randy Savage as a hidden character.

It turns out there are another 21 wrestlers in the game, however, who hail from fake factions called Dead or Alive and Independent Union. In reality these are based on real-life Japanese promotions Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling and Michinoku Pro Wrestling, and while their rosters appear to be fictional they're actually based on real Japanese wrestlers. Black Ninja, for example, is the Great Sasuke, while Hannibal is legendary Japanese fighter Hayabusa. Over time, World Tour would be surpassed by future AKI games, including the one listed next, but despite its relative lack of modes and its patchwork roster, the way in which the studio had nailed the central mechanics laid a rock solid foundation that would be built upon in even greater ways. ■

WCW / NWO REVENGE

Year	1998
Publisher	THQ
Developer	AKI / Asmik Ace Entertainment

AS WELL RECEIVED as WCW vs nWo: World Tour was, there was still plenty of room for improvement before AKI could have been considered to have delivered the definitive video game interpretation of WCW's wrestling. The solution to this was WCW / nWo Revenge: a sequel that improved on its predecessor in every way imaginable, but was still smart enough to not mess around too much with the strong gameplay foundation that had been laid down by World Tour.

The most immediate difference was in the graphics department. Each wrestler now looked noticeably more like their real-life WCW counterpart (while still taking into account the limitations of the Nintendo 64, of course). The roster, meanwhile, had been dramatically increased from 22 WCW wrestlers to more than 50. This included the six-man Raven's Flock stable, a larger nWo now split into red and white armies and a bunch of other WCW stars including the likes of Chris Jericho, Rowdy Roddy Piper, Bret Hart, Booker T and a little up-and-comer by the name of Bill Goldberg. The increased roster also saw the game expanding its repertoire of high-flying wrestlers, with a bunch of new cruiserweights added into the mix. Whereas World Tour already included Rey Mysterio Jr and Ultimo Dragon, Revenge added a bunch of other lucha-like competitors including Psychosis, Juventud Guerrera, Chavo Guerrero Jr and the skeleton suit-wearing La Parka.

FACT

Although Ric Flair was in World Tour, he wasn't in Revenge because he had been fired for no-showing an event. He was eventually given his job back but by that point Revenge's roster had been set in stone.

The game also offered a nice selection of WCW themed arenas. While its predecessor included WCW and nWo branded rings in generic arenas, this time players could choose sets from actual shows and pay-per-views including the likes of WCW Monday Nitro, Bash at the Beach, Halloween Havoc and Starrcade. Other changes included the addition of actual ring entrances, although wrestlers don't have their own official entrance themes: instead, the game plays one of two generic ring themes (which is quite silly when playing a four-man match since at least two wrestlers are guaranteed to have the same music).

Managers were included into the mix too, meaning some players could be accompanied to the ring by the likes of Jimmy Hart, Miss Elizabeth or even the legendary Dusty Rhodes, and while players couldn't control them they could still hop out of the ring and give them a smack for having the gall to be ringside. One change that was met with a slightly more mixed reception, however, was the addition of combo attacks: by grappling an opponent and pressing B, some wrestlers could trigger a combo which consisted of a number of strikes followed by a grapple move. These were a bit awkward and reduced the number of moves a wrestler had, so AKI removed them for its next game. This rare downside aside, Revenge was an enormous improvement over its predecessor and was one of the best-selling third-party N64 games of all time. Ultimately, it would become considered the pinnacle of WCW games, because after this release THQ and AKI jumped ship to the WWF. But that's for a few pages down the line. ■

WETRIX

Year 1998
Publisher Ocean / Imagineer
Developer Zed Two

WETRIX, CREATED BY the legendary British duo the Pickford brothers, is what you would get if you combined Tetris with a particularly interesting geography lesson. The game takes place on an unassuming, square patch of land, whose peaceful existence is rocked by the appearance of Tetris-like shapes, made up of arrows, which start falling from the sky. The player has to move these shapes around and drop them on the land, but the arrows have an impact when they do. If a shape is an Upper (made of up arrows) the land will rise on impact, while a shape made of down arrows (a Downer) makes it lower.

Every so often, large bubbles full of water will descend on the land: if any water spills off the stage a water meter fills up, and when it's full the game is over. The aim, then, is to use the Uppers and Downers to create little pits that can hold the water. This water can then be evaporated with fireballs, which occasionally drop down: the bigger the body of water evaporated, the more points. That would be simple enough, but there are other annoying little gimmicks that appear every now and then to wreck the player's perfectly built hills and valleys. Mines can blast holes in the ground causing leaks, while earthquakes can flatten the landscape if you make a slope that goes too high. Ice cubes, meanwhile, completely freeze the water, making it harder to get rid of. ■

FACT

A sequel called Aqua Aqua was released on the PlayStation 2 in 2000, and was basically the same game with nicer visuals.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Year 1997
Publisher Take-Two Interactive
Developer GameTek

ANYONE WHO'S READ my previous encyclopedias – in particular the NES one – may be breaking out into a cold sweat at the sight of Wheel of Fortune showing up again, but don't worry: there was only one Wheel of Fortune game released on the Nintendo 64 as opposed to the roughly 12,000 released on Nintendo's 8-bit console. The N64 version is hosted by Vanna White, who appears in FMV clips and also walks across the board, turning over correctly guessed letters. The player gets to choose from a selection of digitised human characters, who occasionally pipe up with comically terrible voice acting, screaming 'I'LL SPIN THE WHEEL' with far more enthusiasm than even an American game show would require. The game claims to feature over 4,000 puzzles but it would appear, according to an enterprising data miner, that the total number is actually 3,878. Shame on you, Gametek.

Many of these puzzles are still perfectly solvable today, thanks to solutions such as 'PASSING YOUR DRIVER'S TEST', 'GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK' and the slightly depressing 'CHARLES AND DIANA FINALIZE DIVORCE'. That said, other answers are perhaps a bit dated now decades later, meaning it might be somewhat trickier for younger players to correctly guess the likes of 'JACK WEBB STARS IN DRAGNET' and 'NEWS CORRESPONDENT CHARLES KURALT'. One category called Before & After merges two phrases together (i.e. 'A BLAST FROM THE PAST TENSE'), leading to one slightly awkward answer, 'BLOW OFF A LITTLE STEAM ENGINE'. ■

FACT

If the screenshot is annoying you, the answer is 'CAST ASPERSIONS'.

WINBACK: COVERT OPERATIONS

Year 1999
Publisher Koei / Virgin Interactive
Developer Omega Force

THE TAKING COVER system in third-person action adventure games tends to be credited to Gears of War, but there were a number of games that implemented it before Microsoft's series made it a staple of the genre. WinBack, known as Operation WinBack in Europe, is one of the earlier examples of this. Players take control of the brilliantly named Jean-Luc Cougar, a member of the Special Covert Action Team (S.C.A.T.) who's been sent to a military installation called the GULF system. The facility has been taken over by a terrorist group called Crying Lions, so it's up to Jean-Luc to infiltrate the complex, give the Crying Lions something to really cry about and take control of the GULF system again before the group can take over its satellite laser and use it to cause havoc. While players can technically run about all guns blazing, WinBack is similar to games like Metal Gear Solid in that stealth is the preferable way to get around. This is made easier by the ability to take cover behind most walls and hold a button to lean out and aim your weapon at unsuspecting enemies. The game features two endings, depending on how quickly you get through and reach the laser's control room. If you take too long, pretty much everyone ends up dead except for Jean-Luc and a rookie called Keith. So either way Keith survives, which is nice for Keith I suppose. ■

FACT

Every game is improved with big heads, so enter R, L, R, L, R, R, R, L, Start on the Press Start screen to unlock Big Head mode.

WIPEOUT 64

Year 1998
Publisher Midway
Developer Psygnosis

IT MAY BE unthinkable to consider Sony releasing a PlayStation series on a rival console these days – imagine something like The Last of Us appearing on Xbox – but that's exactly what Sony had been doing with the Wipeout series, developed by Psygnosis (which had been owned by Sony since 1993). The first two games got Sega Saturn ports, while Wipeout 64, technically the third game (despite Wipeout 3 following a year later) was completely exclusive to the Nintendo 64. If you're unfamiliar with the series, it's all about futuristic racing in special floating anti-gravity ships. In one sense this game is a sort of mash-up of the first two Wipeout titles, in that most of the tracks are mirrored versions of courses from Wipeout and Wipeout 2097. However, Wipeout 64 also contained a number of new features exclusive to the N64, most notably the implementation of analogue steering as standard. While Wipeout 2097 needed either Namco's NeGcon controller or Sega's 3D Control Pad to play with analogue controls, the fact it was the default on N64 meant that for the majority of players this was the smoothest Wipeout yet. It wouldn't be Wipeout without a pumping electronic dance soundtrack, and despite the cartridge limitations the N64 version delivered nine tracks, including pieces from Fluke and Propellerheads. There remain debates as to whether Wipeout 64 counts as a proper sequel to Wipeout 2097, or whether it's simply a port with a little more effort put into it than usual. I recommend you leave such arguments to others, and just enjoy the thing. ■

FACT

Wipeout 64 marked the final time the series would be released on a non-Sony system, with all seven subsequent games being exclusive to PlayStation platforms.

WORLD CUP 98

Year 1998
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Canada / Software Creations

IN 1996 EA Sports, who had already obtained the official FIFA licence a couple of years earlier, also secured the licence for FIFA's World Cup competition. This licence would come into play for the first time two years later with the release of the official FIFA World Cup France 98 game. World Cup 98 was based on the same engine as FIFA 98, which had been heralded as a return to form for the series. The game contains every official stadium in France which hosted games during the tournament, and includes a total of 40 national teams to choose from: the 32 that actually qualified, and eight extra ones (in case you reckon Canada, Australia or the Republic of Ireland should have been in there). Players can choose to play the exact same groups and fixtures from the real-life tournament, have the game select random groups or specify their own groups manually. After winning the World Cup you may be wondering what's left to do.

FACT

Yellow and red cards were introduced to football at the 1970 World Cup, but older games in Classics mode still include them here.

The answer is Classics, a new mode that's unlocked and lets the player take part in eight different World Cup finals from the past, with all the players that played in them present and accounted for. The PlayStation version of the game showed these games in sepia and black-and-white with commentary by Kenneth 'they think it's all over' Wolstenholme. The N64 version instead retains full colour and keeps the same John Moston commentary from the other normal game modes, presumably due to storage reasons. ■

WORLD DRIVER CHAMPIONSHIP

Year 1999
Publisher Midway
Developer Boss Game Studios

IT'S EASY TO see just by quickly flicking through this book that the Nintendo 64 wasn't lacking when it came to arcade-style racing games. Where the supply wasn't quite as plentiful, however, was when it came to more realistic simulation-style games. World Driver Championship was one of the last racing games released on the console and is probably the closest the N64 ever got to a Gran Turismo game, though naturally, it still falls fairly short of Sony's PlayStation racer, which was considered obscenely realistic at the time. The game's Championship mode starts you off in 30th place in the overall World Driver Championship standings. At first, players are only eligible to compete in two events in the GT2 classification. As events are entered and gold cups are won, more events are unlocked and the player can slowly work their way up their rankings over time.

FACT

If you think the game looks a tad dark you may want to get hold of the European version, because it adds a 'gamma boost' option to the pause menu.

Once you get near the top you're offered a chance to take part in the GT2 Invitational event, and winning that then gives you access to the Prestigious GT1 division. One of the more interesting aspects of the game is its team-based system: there are seven GT2 teams and eight GT1 teams, each of which has a different owner. While you can jump from team to team like Robbie Keane (a wee football reference there), by sticking with one team for a longer period you'll earn loyalty bonuses which gain you better cars earlier in your career. ■

THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

Year 2000
Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Eurocom

AFTER THE ENORMOUS success of GoldenEye 007, you would have thought that Rare would have received some sort of golden handshake allowing it to continue to make Bond games until the end of time. Instead, in 1998 Electronic Arts formed an agreement with MGM to produce games based on its IP, meaning Rare was no longer involved with the Bond licence. EA turned to Eurocom, which had been working on its own first-person 3D engine, and asked it to make a game based on *The World is Not Enough*. The game more or less follows the plot of the film, in which Bond has to stop a terrorist triggering a nuclear meltdown in Turkey. Although most of the 14 stages are based on locations from the film, Eurocom added a few new ones to extend the game's length a little, including a stage that takes place in the London Underground long before Skyfall did the same thing. While it was always going to draw comparisons to GoldenEye no matter what it was like, in reality The World is Not Enough is actually a fairly accomplished game and a well received Nintendo 64 title thanks to its high resolution graphics, its extensive voice acting and the inclusion of a four-player multiplayer mode that, while not as iconic as Rare's effort, was nevertheless enjoyable. The game is always doomed to be considered second place to its predecessor, but perhaps deserves a lot more love than it gets these days. ■

FACT

Most of the main characters in the game are performed by soundalikes, but Q is one of the few exceptions and was actually performed by John Cleese.

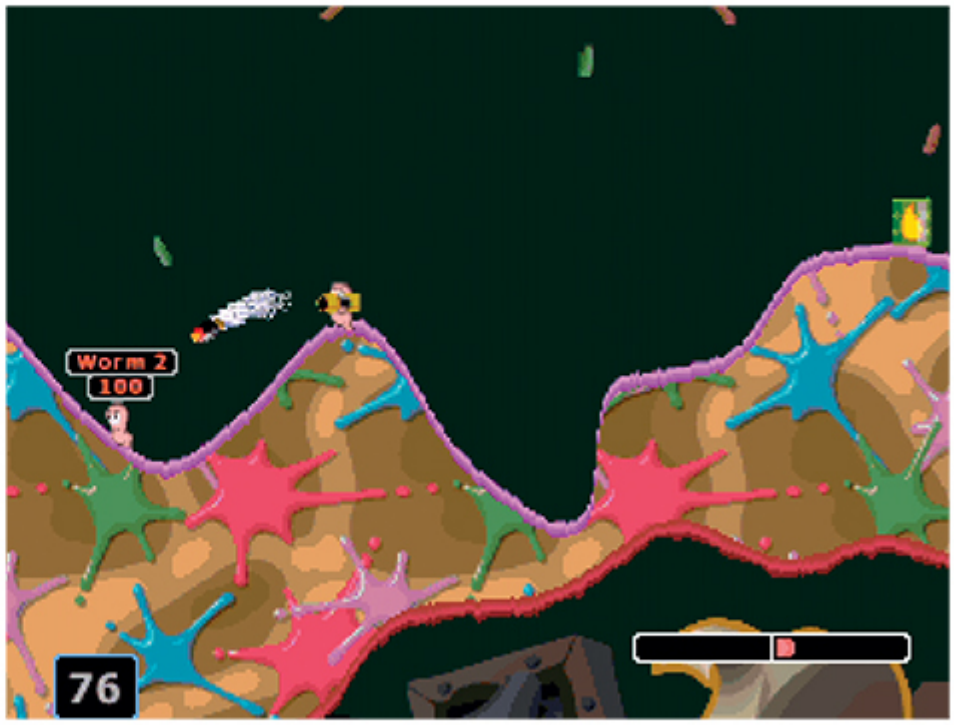
WORMS ARMAGEDDON

Year 1999
Publisher Infogrames
Developer Team17 / Infogrames Lyon House

THE THIRD GAME in Team17's Worms series (after Worms and Worms 2, believe it or not), Worms Armageddon was originally supposed to be an expansion pack for the second game before it was decided to make it a standalone title instead. As a result, the game looks extremely similar to Worms 2, with its more cartoony visuals and its cute big-eyed worm sprites. As in its predecessors, the aim is to put together a team of four worms and guide them to victory by completely wiping out all the other worms on the battlefield. Although it's a turn-based affair, there's a little more action than in something like a tactical RPG, in that each turn gives you a period of time where you can move one of your worms around the map and even use items like ninja ropes, bungee cords and blowtorches to traverse the landscape. Weaponry ranges from traditional fare such as bazookas, grenades, shotguns and Uzis to more comical firearms like the holy hand grenade and mad cows (which can be sent out for a walk and explode as soon as they come into contact with something). The N64 version is mainly feature complete, though a few fire-based weapons (the Petrol Bomb, Napalm Strike and Flame Thrower) aren't in there. The game is generally considered the best in the series because it added just enough features to give players plenty of variety in combat, before subsequent games complicated things a little too much with even more additions. ■

FACT

You can customise your team with different sets of voices. Unfortunately, the Scottish voice set (annoyingly called Jocks) contains a strong homophobic slur, with one line calling an opponent a 'Southern f**'.



WWF WAR ZONE

Year	1998
Publisher	Acclaim Sports
Developer	Iguana West

I HAVE TO apologise for breaking encyclopedia rules and dispensing with alphabetical order for the next few pages, but covering the N64's WWF games in anything other than chronological order can lead to an enormous headache, so bear with me. Acclaim had been making WWF games since the late 1980s, and WWF War Zone was the first to make the jump to polygons. As such, it required a completely new game engine, which was created by Iguana West (later renamed Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City).

The game initially contains 16 playable WWF superstars, mostly consisting of the big names who were ruling the roost at the time of release. These included Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Rock, Triple H, Shawn Michaels, Mankind, the Undertaker and Kane. There was also a selection of mid-card wrestlers including Ahmed Johnson, Owen Hart, Ken Shamrock, Holdust and Farooq, as well as the game's sole tag team, the Headbangers (that's Mosh and Thrasher to you). Interestingly, rounding off the roster are Bret Hart and the British Bulldog, who had already left for WCW by the time the game was released. As a curious gameplay choice, most of the moves in the game are pulled off using button combinations (like in fighting games), and each wrestler had their own unique movesets. This meant players had to memorise command lists to pull off even straightforward suplexes and body slams, though they could pause the game at any point to see a move list (which isn't really ideal during a multiplayer bout). In-game commentary is provided by Vince McMahon and Jim Ross, while each wrestler also has their own voice samples and grunts.

FACT

Players with a Gameshark cheat cartridge can unlock Turok the Dinosaur Hunter as a playable character. It doesn't appear that it was possible to unlock him otherwise.

The main single-player mode is called the WWF Challenge, and has you choosing a character then simply working your way through a series of wrestlers, attempting to eventually prove yourself worthy of challenging for and winning the WWF Championship. Beating this mode with different wrestlers will unlock special cheats and extra characters: win the belt with Mankind, for example, and you'll unlock his alter-egos Cactus Jack and Dude Love, while doing it with Owen Hart unlocks Sue the Ring Girl (I have no idea). The Nintendo 64 version differs from the PlayStation version in a number of ways: it runs at a higher resolution and also includes Royal Rumble and Gauntlet modes, both of which see players taking on a series of opponents in quick succession. These are likely exclusive to the N64 for purely technical reasons, as the console is able to quickly load in characters rather than having to load them from a disc. However, the N64 version is missing the numerous full-motion video sequences which appear in the PlayStation game, which means Nintendo fans miss out on the 'joys' of seeing Ken Shamrock telling them: 'I've got more moves than you can imagine, and I'm going to use them all.' ■

WWF ATTITUDE

Year	1999
Publisher	Acclaim Sports
Developer	Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City

THE SEQUEL TO WWF War Zone embraced the federation's new 'Attitude' era, which marked a shift in TV programming and focused on delivering much edgier content aimed at a slightly older, mostly teenage audience. WWF Attitude attempts to encapsulate this new era while offering a lot more than its predecessor did. For starters, its roster is greatly extended, with a starting line-up of 32 playable wrestlers and a further 12 unlockable characters. Newcomers include gothic trio the Brood, country music swaggerthon Jeff Jarrett, the slightly unhinged Al Snow and the New Age Outlaws. Meanwhile, hidden characters include the likes of Chyna, Jerry the King Lawler, Paul Bearer, Sable, Shawn Michaels and Sergeant Slaughter. Lawler also performs commentary this time along with Shane McMahon, while each wrestler now gets full entrances in which they walk into the ring and taunt the crowd (whereas in War Zone they only appeared on the stage area).

The previous game's pretty basic Challenge mode has been replaced by a new Career mode in which wrestlers start from the lower rungs of the latter. As either one of the game's standard roster or a newly created wrestler, players start off fighting in small 'house shows' and smaller televised events before eventually working their way up to regular appearances on WWF Monday Night Raw and pay-per view events, as along the way they attempt to win the European, Intercontinental and WWF Championship titles. This mode was also supposed to have you playing against 'jobbers' – original characters created by the developers who you would step over on your way to glory – but these were removed before the game was released (their voices and original music can still be found in the game's extensive character creation mode).

FACT

Owen Hart died in an awful in-ring accident before the game was released. He was kept in the roster, but the game opened with an 'in memory' message and Hart was the only wrestler in the game who couldn't bleed.

While WWF Attitude clearly built on its predecessor in a number of ways, however, the area that arguably needed the biggest overhaul – the actual in-ring gameplay – received the least attention. The game retained the same fighting game-style button combination mechanics, meaning memorising move sets was the order of the day once again. While this passed by in War Zone without too much criticism, by the time Attitude was released players were aware of what THQ was pulling off with its WCW games, and it was becoming clear that WWF fans were getting a lesser experience compared to the likes of WCW vs nWo World Tour and WCW / nWo Revenge. Acclaim wouldn't be given the chance to build on this, however, as later that same year its deal with the WWF ended after a decade and the company jumped over to THQ to get some of that sweet AKI gameplay. As seen elsewhere in this book, Acclaim would instead have to tuck its tail between its legs and offer its now underachieving engine to anyone who was interested in it (which would ultimately mean ECW). ■

WWF WRESTLEMANIA 2000

Year	1999
Publisher	THQ / Asmik Ace
Developer	AKI Corporation

AFTER SEEING THE enormous critical success of WCW vs nWo World Tour and WCW / nWo Revenge and comparing it to the critical indifference its own Acclaim-published games like WWF War Zone and WWF Attitude were getting, the World Wrestling Federation finally cancelled its decade-long partnership with Acclaim and decided to do what many fans considered something of a 'face turn' by signing up with THQ to see if AKI could work its magic with the likes of Mr Austin, Mr Rock and Mr Taker.

The first attempt practically knocked it out of the park straight away, as WWF WrestleMania 2000 was quickly heralded as the greatest WWF video game ever released (at the time, at least). The game's starting roster features a solid 50 superstars to choose from, ranging from the likes of Chris 'Y2J' Jericho, the Hardy Boyz, the Godfather and Vince McMahon's stooges, Pat Patterson and Gerald Brisco. There was even a small selection of women wrestlers to choose from, including Chyna, Debra and Ivory.

Players can take part in Singles, Tag Team, Triple Treat, Hardcore and Cage matches, or could try their hand at either a King of the Ring tournament or Royal Rumble match. The game's main mode, however, is called Road to WrestleMania and has players either choosing an existing wrestler or creating one using the game's extensive creation suite.

FACT

The game's code makes reference to the likes of Owen Hart, Goldust, Tiger Ali Singh, Gillberg, Sable and Nicole Bass, but none of them were completed and included in the final game.

They then set off on a season-long career in which they take part in weekly matches on Monday Night Raw and Sunday Night Heat. Players are given title opportunities from time to time, and can even end up owning multiple titles at once. Occasionally pay-per-view events will turn up, and you'll get to either try winning new titles or defending your existing ones (though this can get quite time-consuming if you have a few belts and end up fighting on half the card). The aim, naturally, is to make it all the way to WrestleMania where, all going well, you'll get a shot at the WWF Championship.

As you progress through Road to WrestleMania mode you'll also unlock the game's seven hidden wrestlers: Shawn Michaels, Cactus Jack, Dude Love, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler, Paul Bearer and Stephanie McMahon. Meanwhile, the create-a-wrestler mode essentially compiles all the main roster's outfits and faces and adds a bunch of new ones, allowing players to make their own new creation using a mash-up of existing and original designs. After sorting out their look, they can then customise their entire moveset and choose their entrance music. Players can even edit the costumes of existing wrestlers, meaning if you've always wanted to see Kane wearing the Godfather's pimp outfit, that dream could finally come true (allowing you to get over it and start having normal dreams again instead). You can even remove Kane's mask in this mode, which… well, that would be telling.

WWF NO MERCY

Year	2000
Publisher	THQ
Developer	AKI Corporation

AS FANTASTIC AS WWF WrestleMania 2000 was, the following year THQ and AKI completely blew it out of the water with its successor, WWF No Mercy, which many still consider to this day to be the greatest wrestling game ever made. Including unlockable characters, the game's new roster has expanded to an enormous 75 superstars, with new additions including the likes of Kurt Angle, Rikishi and Trish Stratus. Unlockables spanned a wide range of quality, from bonafide legends like Andre the Giant and the Fabulous Moolah to truly bizarre inclusions such as ring announcer Howard Finkle, Vince McMahon's wife Linda, and one of pimp character Godfather's 'lady helpers', who in this game goes by the simple name 'Ho'. Look, it was a different time.

The lengthy but repetitive Road to WrestleMania mode from the previous game has been ditched in favour of a new Championship mode, which consists of a series of preset storylines covering the Women's, Light Heavyweight, European, Hardcore, Tag Team, Intercontinental and WWF Championships. Each belt has its own unique branching storyline, with the player getting different cutscenes and matches depending on whether they won or lost each round. To this day, No Mercy's Championship mode is probably the best interpretation of actual WWF/E programming as players can see the story unfold in front of them and change depending on how they perform, with the branching storylines also encouraging repeat playthroughs as players try to get 100 per cent completion on each belt's story.

That's not the only thing that drives players to keep on playing. As matches are won, players earn currency which can be spent at the Smackdown Mall, a new in-game store which lets them unlock new wrestlers, outfits, moves and even weapons (including a giant novelty beer can, or a comically oversized copy of The Rock's autobiography). Other new features include the ability to go backstage for the first time in a WWF game, with a variety of new areas to fight in including a locker room, a hallway and a car park. Meanwhile, the addition of ladder matches adds an extra layer of chaos to proceedings, while there are a healthy 10 different arenas to choose from, designed to look like the sets of recent pay-per-views.

FACT

The first batch of No Mercy games had a huge bug which regularly wiped players' save files. THQ promptly released a Version 1.1 cartridge and offered to replace broken ones. However, the European replacements also removed blood from the game.

Ultimately, WWF No Mercy was the culmination of AKI's efforts up to that point. What started with World Tour had evolved through Revenge, WrestleMania 2000 and now No Mercy, with the final result being a fully refined, perfectly balanced wrestling game with heaps of content and an immensely playable fighting mechanic that still makes it hugely entertaining decades after release. Sadly, THQ and AKI went their separate ways not long after WWF No Mercy was released, ending the perfect relationship, and while AKI would take its engine over to EA for its Def Jam wrestling games, it just wasn't the same.

XENA WARRIOR PRINCESS: THE TALISMAN OF FATE

Year	1999
Publisher	Titus Software
Developer	Saffire

XENA WARRIOR PRINCESS was a hugely popular television show that drew large audiences throughout the second half of the 1990s. Starring Lucy Lawless, it followed the titular Xena, a warrior trying to gain redemption for her past sins against the innocent by using her bad-ass fighting ability to help anyone who needs them. While most fantasy TV series of ilk would usually end up getting the standard third-person action adventure game treatment (much like Xena's sister show *Hercules* did on the N64), The Talisman of Fate is instead a one-on-one fighting game developed by Saffire, which had recently finished work on another Nintendo 64 fighting game, BioFREAKS. The game's plot opens with Xena trying to get her hands on the titular Talisman of Fate, which gives its possessor control over the destiny of the world. The problem is, the Talisman is also being sought by Despair, the champion of Dahak (and an original character created just for this game). As Xena fights Despair they both end up with the Talisman at varying points and so both claim ownership, so the Fates step in and declare that a contest must decide who gets it. Rather than simply having a single fight to get the job done quickly, Xena instead gets to choose a selection of potential fighters to defend the world, and so the contest begins as Earth's greatest heroes and villains all compete in a ruddy big fight-fest to determine who the winner is. Their prize? To have a final battle against Despair and, should they manage to beat him, gain control of the Talisman and have their say on the world's destiny. There are 10 characters to choose from, all of whom featured in the series: Xena, Gabrielle, Joxer, Callisto, Autolycus, Area, Epiphany, Lao Ma, Velasca and Caesar (while Despair is unlockable if you can defeat him). Each character has their own different ending, though it's only presented as a series of images with text explaining what happened. Winning with Autolycus (the excellent Bruce Campbell), for example, has him hiding the Talisman again because, as the king of thieves, life wouldn't be fun if he kept it and never had to steal again.

FACT

Xena and Gabrielle were always teased to be a couple in the TV show but it never happened due to network politics. At least if you beat the game with Xena she and Gabrielle have a bath together. Yes, really. No, you don't see it.

Combat in The Talisman of Fate takes place in free-roaming 3D arenas, rather than simply being locked to a 2D plane. As well as fighting through each opponent one at a time as you'd expect in a game like this, if you play in Hard difficulty you actually have to fight two opponents at once, which is hardly fair when the fate of the world is at stake. Thankfully, there's also the option to play the game in co-op, with two human players fighting together. If there are extra players up for a fight, the game also has a more straightforward versus mode where up to four characters can fight on-screen at the same time, in either a two-on-two or three-on-one battle.

YOSHI'S STORY

Year	1997
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo EAD

THE MOST COMMONLY told story about the development of Yoshi's Island on the SNES goes that Shigeru Miyamoyo was so keen not to go with Donkey Kong Country's pre-rendered graphics style that he and his team pushed a hand-drawn style instead, as a way of fighting back by going in the completely opposite direction. Yoshi's Story, on the other hand, appears to favour a 'best of both worlds' compromise, as while Yoshi and other characters in the game are indeed pre-rendered, the backgrounds still have that handcrafted look, this time giving the appearance of stages that have been created with cardboard, wood, fabric and other materials.

The game revolves around the Super Happy Tree, a giant tree that provides this source of happiness on Yoshi's Island. Baby Bowser isn't too impressed to see that all the Yoshis are having a great time, so he steals the Super Happy Tree, casting a gloom over the whole island. What's more, he then casts a spell, turning the island into a pop-up picture book. This is the final straw for all the Yoshis, who collapse in despair. All seems lost for Yoshi's Island, except for one thing: six little Yoshi eggs, which subsequently hatch. Because these baby Yoshis missed all the hullabaloo they're unaffected, but they can still tell something isn't quite right. The baby Yoshis decide to team up and head out to find the Super Happy Tree and bring happiness back to Yoshi's Island.

FACT

When Nintendo started sending Game Boy Advance development kits to studios, they included a tech demo simply called Yoshi Demo, which looked like a GBA version of Yoshi's Story. It never became a real game, though.

Although the game at first glance looks and plays very similarly to Yoshi's Island, it isn't considered a direct sequel. The general mechanics will be familiar to fans of the SNES title, in that Yoshi is still armed with a flutter jump which enables him to travel farther and higher in the air. He can still eat enemies by gobbling them up with his comically long tongue, and he can still turn his digested foes into eggs, which can then be aimed and fired at other enemies and targets. The main difference here, however, is the complete lack of Baby Mario, who doesn't feature in this game. In the SNES title, every time you took a hit, Baby Mario would fly off Yoshi's back in a bubble, wailing away until you were able to reach and pop the bubble and recover him. Players who were stressed out by this will no doubt have welcomed Yoshi's Story's decision to ditch this in favour of a health bar, which can be topped up by eating fruit. Each Yoshi has a favourite fruit, which matches their colour, and if a Yoshi eats their favourite fruit they'll gain more health and score more points. To finish each level, the baby Yoshis have to eat 30 different fruits.

Yoshi's Story was released to a slightly tepid response at the time, with critics bemoaning the game's lack of challenge. In an era where we've now seen numerous 'easy' platformers (most notably the continuation of the Kirby series), it may be worth re-evaluating it, because there are some fun ideas in there. ■

THE JAPANESE GAMES

The previous Encyclopedias in this series have focused solely on games released in the west. The main reason for this is that the NES, SNES and Mega Drive / Genesis already had such enormous libraries in the west that to then delve into the world of Japanese games would more than double the size and price of each book, and would have required easily a couple of years of extra research per book for a section that a smaller percentage of readers would find useful. That said, Japanese game libraries are always something I want to include in my books if the opportunity arises, and this book is one such opportunity because the Nintendo 64 library is smaller and more manageable. As such, for the first time in the series, here's a section dedicated solely to Japanese releases.

There were roughly a hundred games released exclusively in Japan for the Nintendo 64 and you'll find them all in this section. If there's a game you're aware of, but you can't find it here, it may be worth checking the index at the back of the book, because there's a chance it may have been released in the west under a different name. Eltale Monsters, Choro Q and City Tour GrandPrix, for example, are already in the western section under the names Quest 64, Penny Racers and GT 64: Championship Edition respectively. The only time a Japanese port of a game is included here is if it provides a notable difference from its western counterpart: for example, Jikkyou World Soccer 3 is basically International Superstar Soccer 64 and wouldn't usually be included, but it has a different selection of teams and is therefore technically a different (if extremely similar) game.

This section also includes the 10 games released for the Nintendo 64DD add-on, which was only released in Japan. The 64DD promised to greatly expand the N64's capabilities by adding a disk drive to the bottom of the console. This drive reads 64MB magnetic disks and provides significantly more storage for both for developers and players, not only expanding the capabilities of games but also enhancing player creation options. The 64DD also enabled players to connect their N64 to a special online server where they could share their creations with other players. Although the 64DD had enormous potential, the add-on was ultimately an enormous fop and only 10 titles were released for it before the entire thing was binned with just 15,000 units sold. All 10 of those games can be found at the start of this section, with '64DD' at the start of the title to keep them together.

The N64's Japanese library is an interesting insight into the different tastes of Japanese players. There are more mahjong games here than any sensible person would ever need in their lifetime, and Japan's love for baseball and football is clearly on display here with Konami in particular releasing numerous officially licensed Nippon Professional Baseball and J-League games. You'll also find a relatively large number of board games, many of which pre-date Mario Party (so you can thrust this book under the nose of anyone who claims Nintendo invented the genre). Hopefully this section sheds a different light on the diversity of the Nintendo 64's library worldwide and adds a little more colour and depth to the book (and hopefully if you're a native Japanese speaker you won't hate me too much for the inevitable title translation typos that are likely in here). Differing library sizes mean I won't be able to include Japanese sections in every future Encyclopedia, but I certainly intend to add them where I can (including the upcoming *Dreamcast Encyclopedia*).

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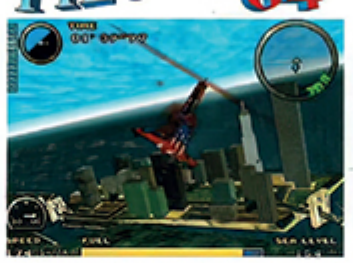

ハンググライダー、ロケットベルト、ジャイロコプターなど多彩な乗り物を操り、大空に挑む。NINTENDO 64ならではの3次元表示能力とアナログ操作が可能な3Dスティックによって大空を舞うリアルな飛行感を実現した。

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最強羽生将棋

64ビットCPUによって、最強最速の本将棋対局ができる。しかも、強さレベルの設定により初心者から有段者まで実力に応じた対局も可能。羽生七冠王の棋譜600局以上を収録し、実力試験モードではプレイヤーの段級位の目安の診断もできる。

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64DD – DOSHIN THE GIANT

Year 1999
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Param

PERHAPS BETTER REMEMBERED among Nintendo fans for its GameCube remaster, Doshin the Giant is a strange God simulator similar to the likes of Populous, in which rather than overseeing the land from above as an invisible deity you're instead wandering around on the land itself as a bright yellow giant who looks just like one of those inflatable wavy arm things you see outside of car dealerships in America.

Doshin is a legendary giant that rises out of the sea when the sun rises in the morning, interacts with the island of Baruda then heads back into the sea at night. As Doshin, the player can wander around Baruda and perform various actions (mostly involving picking things up) that either please or upset the four different tribes who live there. As Doshin makes the natives happy he earns love hearts, which make him grow in size for the rest of that day. If you aren't feeling particularly benevolent though, with the press of a button you can turn into Doshin's alter-ego Jashin, an evil red giant who grows not with hearts, but with the skulls he earns for upsetting the villagers by generally wrecking the joint. Doshin the Giant is charmingly silly, and while it's probably not worth going to the effort to track down a 64DD to play it, the GameCube version released a few years later looks better and offers more content, and is therefore well worth a look. ■

FACT

Doshin's creator Kazutoshi Iida is a big Grand Theft Auto fan, and while Doshin couldn't be more different he says he appreciates that both games experimented with open worlds.

64DD – DOSHIN THE GIANT: KAIHOU SENSEN CHIBIKKO CHIKKO DAISHUUGOU

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Param

ROUGHLY TRANSLATED AS Liberation Front Chibikko Chikko Grand Assembly, this sequel to Doshin the Giant dials up the oddness factor significantly. You play as a small child who's fallen asleep and entered a dream world where Doshin has been imprisoned in a cage. The child has to rescue Doshin by running around and tinkling love hearts on people. Players can insert the first game's disk to load their progress: as you build monuments in the first game, other children appear in the second game and you can tinkle on them to recruit them, helping you spread the love quicker and helping Doshin grow so big he bursts out of his cage. Look, we're only two games into this Japanese section so you're going to have to pace yourself. ■

FACT

The game also contains nearly 20 black-and-white clips from an animated film called *More Than Giant*. The film was released on VHS in Japan to promote the game and is awful.

64DD – F-ZERO X EXPANSION KIT

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD

IF YOU THOROUGHLY enjoyed F-Zero X and were hoping for a sequel, tough luck: it never happened (not on the N64, anyway). The next best thing was the F-Zero X Expansion Kit, a 64DD disk that works alongside the original cartridge to provide a bunch of new features. As well as two new cups adding 12 new tracks (including one shaped like a big foot called, um… Big Foot), there's a new track editor which lets players create their own circuits using a toolset similar to the one used by the game's actual developers. There's also a car editor, which lets you make your own F-Zero vehicle by combining a bunch of preset parts, then tweaking its performance settings. ■

FACT

Because 64DD disks can hold more than an N64 cartridge, the soundtrack in the Expansion Kit consists of stereo tracks instead of the mono ones in the original F-Zero X.

64DD – JAPAN PRO TOUR GOLF 64

Year 2000
Publisher Media Factory
Developer Media Factory

THIS DETAILED GOLF simulator for the 64DD includes the names and likenesses of 144 real-life Japanese golfers. Players can create their own golfer from a series of preset characters (one of whom looks suspiciously like Tiger Woods) and take part in a series of modes ranging from your typical Match Play and Stroke Play offerings to a lengthy season mode in which you compete in a variety of tournaments to try and earn the most prize money for the whole year. There are an impressive 10 courses in the game, all of which are located in Japan (so good news, Ibaraki Country Club East Course fans). Players could also use the Randnet disk (see the next page) to play against others online. ■

FACT

One of the courses in the game is the Izumi Course, which was designed by former world number 1 golfer Seve Ballesteros (who also designed a number of other courses in Japan).

64DD – MARIO ARTIST: PAINT STUDIO

Year 1999
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD / Software Creations

EASILY THE MOST accessible of the Mario Artist titles, Paint Studio could be considered a spiritual successor to Mario Paint on the SNES. Using either the optional N64 Mouse or the standard Control Stick, players can paint their own creations, using various stamps and backgrounds of Nintendo characters if they needed inspiration. The game also includes a basic animation mode, and three 3D worlds – a Mars-like planet, underwater and a dinosaur world – where players can wander around, take photos of the creatures they see, and even paint over the textures of certain character models. Those with a Transfer Pak and Game Boy Camera can also import the photos they've taken on their Game Boy and draw over them. ■

FACT

A prototype version of Paint Studio included a 3D remake of the Gnat Attack fly-swatting mini-game from Mario Paint. It was removed from the final version.

64DD – MARIO ARTIST: COMMUNICATION KIT

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD

THE MARIO ARTIST series was a collection of 64DD titles that allowed players to make a variety of creations, from paintings to polygonal models to animations. There were three titles released in the series (as you'll see in the following entries), as well as the Communication Kit. This didn't really offer any creation tools in itself but allowed players to connect to an online Net Studio and share the things they'd created in the other Mario Artist games. Players could also enter competitions and order printouts of their creations to be delivered in the mail. The Communication Kit also included a bunch of Nintendo-created templates which could be transferred over for use in Mario Artist: Paint Studio. ■

FACT

The Communication Kit has hidden support for the Game Boy Printer, but a cable to connect it to the N64 was never released. Its code also includes hidden support for a Game Boy Printer Color, unreleased hardware that would have printed colour pictures.

64DD – MARIO ARTIST: POLYGON STUDIO

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD / Nichimen Graphics

A COLLABORATION WITH polygonal software developer Nichimen Graphics, Polygon Studio was to be the last release in the Mario Artist series and was probably the most complex. Players can build and render 3D polygonal shapes, then give them textures and paint them. It's then possible to create models by joining together shapes (either player-made or preset ones) and use them to explore a 3D world where more parts can be found. Polygon Studio also includes two mini-games: the first is called Go Go Park and has the player winding up their model to see if they can make it stop at a specific point. Far more interesting, though, is Sound Bomber, which is basically a microgame collection that plays like a very early version of WarioWare. ■

FACT

Nichimen Graphics created N-World, a 3D graphics package. N-World was used to create graphics for many games in the '90s including Super Mario 64 and Final Fantasy VII.

64DD – MARIO ARTIST: TALENT STUDIO

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD

ALTHOUGH SHIGERU MIYAMOTO had been toying with the idea of virtual avatars even as far back as the 8-bit days (a Mii-like prototype was created in the '80s), Talent Studio was Nintendo's first commercially available attempt at it. The app – it's not really a game – lets you create your own characters, either making their faces from scratch, importing them from a Game Boy Camera or using the provided Capture Cartridge to grab a face from VCR or camcorder footage. Once your character is created, you can put them in a bunch of bizarre animations, or create your own stories using the movie maker tool. Talent Studio is an absurd but entertaining piece of software, and the clear ancestor of later games like Tomodachi Life. ■

FACT

There were four more Mario Artist titles planned but scrapped: Game Maker, Graphical Message Maker, Sound Maker and Video Jockey Maker.

64DD – RANDNET DISK

Year 1999
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo / Recruit

CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'VE REACHED the driest entry in the entire book. The Randnet disk was a collaboration between Nintendo and Japanese media company Recruit to provide internet services for 64DD users. Included with the 64DD, the Randnet Starter Kit included the disk and a modem which allowed the console to connect online, letting players surf the internet, use special Nintendo forums and use an online store to buy new games, CDs and books. For those who took their N64 browsing extra seriously, the disk supported the N64 mouse and a keyboard peripheral was sold separately. The Randnet service started on the 64DD's launch date of 13 December 1999 and lasted until the 64DD was discontinued on 28 February 2001. ■

FACT

The name Randnet means 'Recruit and Nintendo Network', so technically it should probably have been called RandNnet.

64DD – SIMCITY 64

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer HAL Laboratory

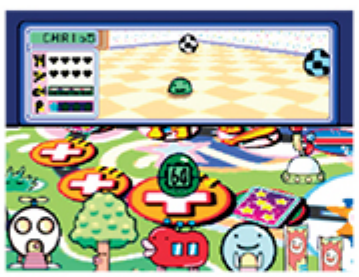
NINTENDO HAD ALREADY seen notable success with its SNES version of SimCity, and the 64DD's disk storage made it the ideal home for a successor. SimCity 64 is technically a sequel to that SNES title, given that it once again features the Nintendo-only character Dr Wright as the player's advisor. Although the SimCity series had evolved on PC with games like SimCity 2000 and SimCity 3000, the 64DD game is notable for being the first ever SimCity title to use polygonal 3D graphics rather than 2D sprites. In one sense this made the game look initially less detailed than its PC counterparts, but it did allow for some interesting features unique to the SimCity 64. Not only could you rotate and zoom your city however you saw fit, you could even take a helicopter ride around it. Even better, if you wanted to get really up close and personal with your newly constructed infrastructure, you could actually go down to street level and walk around your city, seeing all your buildings from the ground. While on foot, you could also play hide and seek games with your citizens to earn extra money, a technique that – to the best of my knowledge – has not yet been attempted by real-life city mayors. Believe it or not, SimCity 64 was also the first game to have an actual day and night cycle, as all the SimCity games released before it always took place in the day. ■

FACT

Players can draw their own characters in Mario Artist: Paint Studio and import them into SimCity as little customised citizens.

64 DE HAKKEN!! TAMAGOTCHI: MINNA DE TAMAGOTCHI WORLD

Year	1997
Publisher	Bandai
Developer	Bandai / Hudson Soft



THE TAMAGOTCHI VIRTUAL pet was all the rage in the late '90s, but surely a video game version would have been a little bit too basic? 64 de Hakken!! gets around this problem by instead offering a novelty board game, where players are each given a Tamagotchi and must care for it using points they earn by going round the board. Every action you perform on your pet – feeding it, playing with it and the like – uses up points, so by landing on certain squares and taking part in mini-games you can continue to top up your points balance. The aim is to be the first player to fully evolve your Tamagotchi to adulthood, and send it off to college. Okay, I made up the college bit. ■

FACT

By winning the game you can potentially unlock Mariotchi and Waruotokotchi, special Tamagotchi characters who look like Mario and Wario.

64 HANAFUDA: TENSHI NO YAKUSOKU

Year	1999
Publisher	Altron
Developer	Altron

ALTHOUGH NINTENDO HAS a long history with hanafuda playing cards – it's well known that the company first started as a hanafuda manufacturer – it's not like hanafuda was its own creation or anything, it's just a traditional Japanese game. As such, this hanafuda game (whose title translates as 64 Hanafuda: Angel's Promise) has nothing to do with Nintendo. Rather than simply offering frills-free card-playing action, the game has a story mode, in which you play as a chap who returns back to his hometown to see a meteor shower, and ends up playing hanafuda against a bunch of people along the way, because why not. If that seems a bit contrived, there's also a mode where you can just play straight hanafuda with no plot. ■

FACT

Nintendo still makes the occasional set of hanafuda cards, and you can play Hanafuda in its Switch title 51 Worldwide Games (known as Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics in North America).

64 OOZUMOU

Year	1998
Publisher	Bottom Up
Developer	Bottom Up

MANY OF THE Nintendo 64 games released only in Japan were exclusive to that region for obvious reasons, and 64 Oozumou is one such example. Sumo wrestling may be one of Japan's most well-loved sports, but in the west it's got a following as large as that of a Twitter user with an anime avatar and numbers after their name. As well as the ability to have one-off bouts, the game's main mode is its career mode, in which you start off at the 15th rank of maegashira (the lowest of five divisions in the top sumo league) and have to work your way up to become yokozuna (the champion). The game contains impressively chatty commentary too. ■

FACT

Maegashira is the fifth-highest rank in the top makuuchi division. Sumo wrestlers have to make their way through the komusubi, sekiwake and ouzeki ranks before they can try to become yokozuna.

64 OOZUMOU 2

Year	1999
Publisher	Bottom Up
Developer	Bottom Up

JAPAN OBVIOUSLY REALLY loves its sumo, so a single sumo wrestling game just wasn't going to cut it. 64 Oozumou 2 is similar to its predecessor in terms of general look and gameplay mechanics, but there's now the option to create your own wrestler by choosing his name, face, eyes, body shape – which to be fair is just different variations on obese – and their standard characteristics, be that popular, powerful, fast or what have you (these affect his stats). The aim as before is to work your way up to yokozuna, but this time the career mode takes place over five years (instead of two like before). Over 600 events can occur in your career, from competing with rivals to falling in love. ■

FACT

In real life, being promoted to yokozuna requires both ability and proof that you can take on the role with 'hinkaku' (dignity and grace). There's no set number of yokozuna: sometimes there have been none, sometimes as many as four.

64 TRUMP COLLECTION: ALICE NO WAKU WAKU TRUMP WORLD

Year 1998
Publisher Bottom Up
Developer Bottom Up

IF YOU'VE EVER enjoyed any of the book or movie versions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and decided 'what this story really needs is Alice playing cards with everyone she finds like some sort of beer-soaked barfly' then you're in luck, because 64 Trump Collection offers just that (apologies to anyone expecting a game in which you explore the family tree of America's 45th president). The story mode has Alice travelling to Trump World, which almost certainly isn't canon, and presents the story in a charming pop-up book fashion (accompanied by plinky-plonky piano music playing the likes of *The Entertainer*) interspersed with card game battles against a variety of weird and wonderful characters. ■

FACT

In one of the more unusual review summaries I've seen, UK publication *N64 Magazine* called 64 Trump Collection 'a real Lennie Bennett of a game', referring to a UK TV personality from the '70s and '80s.

AI SHOGI 3

Year 1998
Publisher ASCII Something Good
Developer AI

SHOGI IS WHAT you would get if you cross chess with brainwashing. While it looks similar to chess, many of the pieces can't move quite as far as their chess equivalents. The twist, then, is that when players catch an opponent's piece, they can put them back on the board to fight for them instead. The 'AI' in the title refers to software created by Hiroshi Yamashita, a Japanese computer game scientist whose Shogi program, Yamashita Shogi System – also known as AI Shogi – is a three-time Shogi tournament gold medal winner. It goes without saying, then, that the CPU opponent in AI Shogi 3 doesn't mess around, though there's an option to play against an easier opponent should you wish. And why wouldn't you? ■

FACT

Not content with just making an award-winning Shogi AI, Yamashita has also developed AI software that plays Go and Game of the Amazons.

BAKURETSU MUTEKI BANGAIOH

Year 1999
Publisher ESP
Developer Treasure

BETTER KNOWN IN the west as Bangai-O (because of the western Dreamcast port of the same name), this shooter is the work of the action game maestros at Treasure. Players take on the role of Riki and Mami, a pair of siblings who both pilot a giant mech called Bangai-O. I say giant, but the game's camera is so zoomed out that the player sprite is one of the smallest on the Nintendo 64. The aim is to fly around each of the game's 44 stages taking out enemies and other objects like buildings, while also attempting to find and destroy the boss in each level. Everything you destroy drops fruit, which fills a meter: once full you can trigger it to unleash a barrage of up to 100 missiles. ■

FACT

The Dreamcast version of Bangai-O fills the meter right away when you destroy things instead of making you collect the fruit they drop, making its pace a little faster.

BAKUSHOU JINSEI 64: MEZASE! RESORT O

Year 1998
Publisher Taito
Developer Taito

A MERE FORTNIGHT after Mario Party was released, Taito released its own N64 video board game. This one, however, is loosely based on Jinsei Game, which is the Japanese version of The Game of Life. In practice though, it's perhaps more similar to Monopoly, in that one of the main things you do is buy up any of the land you stop on so you can build hotels on it (you can also buy shops). The game has a significantly more complex financial side to it than Monopoly, though: not only can you buy stocks and play the stock market, you also have to pay tax on your earnings any time you pass the bank. There are seven boards, ranging from a small mountain town to Beverly Hills. ■

FACT

Japan loves Jinsei: there were six versions of Jinsei Game released on the Famicom alone, and five released on the Super Famicom.

BASS RUSH ECOGEAR POWERWORM CHAMPIONSHIP

Year 2000
Publisher Visco Corporation
Developer Visco Corporation

JAPANESE DEVELOPER VISCO wasn't messing around when it came to its sole fishing game (pun unintended but I'll take it). The game contains photo-realistic depictions of six Japanese lakes: Lake Kutcharo, Lake Kitaura, Lake Kasumigaura, Lake Nojiri, Lake Biwa and the Ikehara Dam. And when I say photo-realistic, that's because the background is literally a digitised photo that slides across when you turn the camera. If it's lures you're looking for this game has them up the wazoo, with a total of 102 hard and soft lures. This is doubtless due to the game's official licensing deal with Japanese fishing company Ecogear Concept: if there's anything it doesn't know about lures, it's not worth knowing. I mean, I'd imagine not, I don't know. ■

FACT

Lake Kitaura is a smaller lake next to Lake Kasumigaura, and actually connects to it at one point. Technically the whole thing is known as Kasumigaura but hey, who's counting.

BOMBERMAN 64

Year 2001
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Racjin

THIS COULD BE a little confusing, because there's already a Bomberman 64 in the first section of this book. Whereas that game was more of a 3D platformer (and was known in Japan as Baku Bomberman), this one was released four years later and is a Japanese exclusive which plays far more like the 8-bit and 16-bit Bomberman titles. This is particularly the case in the single-player mode, which contains the typical array of enemy-ridden stages as seen in NES and SNES Bomberman games, with each stage requiring to be wiped clean of bad guys before the next stage can be accessed. Whereas other N64 Bomberman games use polygons, Bomberman 64 is fully sprite-based. ■

FACT

Bomberman 64 was the last N64 game released in Japan. Only Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 in North America was released after it.

CHORO Q 64 2: HACHAMECHA GRAND PRIX

Year 1999
Publisher Takara
Developer Locomotive Corporation

IF YOU'RE WONDERING what happened to the first Choro Q 64, it's already in this book: it was released in the west as Penny Racers. This sequel was a Japan-only affair, though it's more of the same sort of thing, with players racing adorably tiny toy cars. There are nine tracks to race on, ranging from jungle ruins to a city circuit to a snow-filled track with a cave section (all the track types that are required by law, basically). As in other Choro Q games customisation is key, with 30 different car body types and a bunch of other parts that can be swapped out including your engine, tyres, brakes and steering wheel. There's also a full track creator mode. ■

FACT

There have been more than 25 games in the Choro Q series over the years. Though most were Japan-only, some made it to the west under names like Penny Racers, Gadget Racers and Road Trip.

CHOU-KUUKAN NIGHT: PRO YAKYUU KING

Year 1996
Publisher Imagineer
Developer Genki

IF YOU'RE LOOKING for a Japanese baseball game that has an official licence but doesn't take itself too seriously, then Chou-Kuukan Night is the one for you. The game has the official Nippon Professional Baseball Organization licence, meaning it boasts 12 real-life Japanese baseball teams (but not their real player names or likenesses), as well as two all-star teams and an original team you can customise yourself. While the general mechanics are sound enough, there are times where the action gets slightly unrealistic, with occasional two-headed players and bodies that break apart when hit by the ball. As only the eighth game released on the N64 it didn't have much competition, but that didn't stop it being thoroughly entertaining anyway. ■

FACT

The stadiums in the game aren't based on real-life ones, and sometimes have odd properties. The Yomiuri Giants play at the Hyperspace Dome, for example, where the gravity is lower and balls can be hit further.

CHOU-KUUKAN NIGHT: PRO YAKYUU KING 2

Year 1999
Publisher Imagineer
Developer Genki

GIVEN THAT MOST sports game sequels tend to arrive a year later, the three-year wait for a sequel for Pro Yakyuu King fans must have been a particularly gruelling one. Still, said sequel did eventually arrive, offering a bunch of new features. Each team now had 40 real players (making a total of 480), and the game offered 11 real baseball stadiums, each with their real names, as well as five comedy stadiums including a space-themed one where the gravity is low, and one set on a beach where a heavy wind is constantly blowing. There's also a Scenario mode where players can recreate key moments from the 1998 season, including that time when… ah, you remember. ■

FACT

You can create up to 40 new players and add them to one of the game's teams. Rather than simply setting their stats, you also have to put them through a press conference and answer questions to determine what type of player they are.

CUSTOM ROBO

Year 1999
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Noise Inc

WHAT WOULD YOU get if you combined Pokémon with the legendary British TV show *Robot Wars*? The answer, more or less, is Custom Robo. You play as a young lad (who you can name) who's given his very own toy robot on his birthday, called Ray. It's up to you to enter Ray in various battles and earn money that you can spend on upgrades, so you can eventually become the Pokém… um, the Custom Robo Master. Whereas Pikachu and pals fight in turn-based affairs, the combat in Custom Robo is in real-time as you move your robot around arenas, trying to shoot down your opponent's robot and wear out their energy first. There's also an Arcade mode, which focuses mainly on battles. ■

FACT

At the time of writing there have been five Custom Robo games. The fourth (Custom Robo on GameCube) was the first released in the west, and the fifth (Custom Robo Arena on DS) was the only one released in Europe.

CUSTOM ROBO V2

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Noise Inc

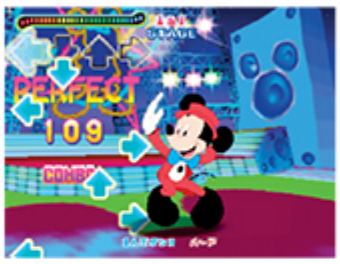
IF THE FIRST game didn't fulfil players' customised robotics needs, then Custom Robo V2 duly arrived a year later for a second helping. Set a year after the events of the first game, players this time start their adventure with the new and improved Ray Mk 2, which they won in a contest. This time the game is split into two scenarios, A New Journey and The Grand Battle (the latter of which is significantly longer). For the most part, things play like they did in the original game – albeit with an all-new plot, of course – though there is one new addition in the form of four-player battles. The game can't handle four Robos on-screen, though, so these are tag team fights. ■

FACT

The Ray Mk III, which appears in Custom Robo Arena on the DS, appears as an assist trophy in Super Smash Bros Brawl.

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION: DISNEY DANCING MUSEUM

Year 2000
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEK



YOU COULD PROBABLY fill a whole book with Dance Dance Revolution games (and its European version Dancing Stage) alone, but the Nintendo 64 only got one of them and it was themed to celebrate all things House of Mouse. There are 22 songs in total, only a couple of which are legit Disney songs (such as the 'Mickey Mouse March' and 'It's a Small World'). The rest consist of dance versions of the likes of 'Turkey in the Straw' and the generically named 'Russian Dance'. Players can play with a controller, but DDR obviously comes into its own with a floor mat, and sure enough, the game could be bought in a special bundle with an N64 dance mat emblazoned with Mickey and pals. ■

FACT

Donald Duck appears to be dressed like Elvis in this game, complete with trademark wavy hairdo and sunglasses. They don't suit him.

DENSHA DE GO! 64

Year 1999
Publisher Taito
Developer AI

SOMETIMES THERE ARE just entire, long-running series that never make it outside of Japan. Densha de Go! is a prime example of this: it started in the mid '90s and, as I write this in 2022, is still going strong with a recent Switch and PS2 title. And yet we've never seen it in the west, which means we've been missing out on some realistic train-driving goodness for a long time. This N64 game is a port of the second entry in the series, and lets players drive a train on seven different lines, including the extremely busy Yamanote Line loop in Tokyo. The game supports a special train controller, which plugs into controller port 3 and resembles a real train's controls. ■

FACT

Denha de Go! 64 is the only other N64 game, other than Hey You! Pikachu, that supports the Voice Recognition Unit microphone. Players can use it to announce stations to passengers.

DERBY STALLION 64

Year 2001
Publisher Media Factory
Developer ParityBit

THAT THING YOU just read about Densha de Go! never making it outside of Japan? You can go ahead and apply it to Derby Stallion and its 24 games too. Derby Stallion 64 is the 16th instalment (there were lots before it on the likes of the Famicom, Super Famicom and home computers) and is a horse racing simulation where your aim is to win the title of GI Racer by growing and maintaining the best group of horses you can. The main new feature of this – which, incidentally, was the penultimate N64 game released in Japan – is the ability to save your horses to a Controller Pak then use them to take on friends in 'breeder battles' to see who's the best. ■

FACT

In recent years the series has been mainly appearing on Nintendo systems, with Derby Stallion games released on the DS in 2008, 3DS in 2014 and Switch in 2020.

DEZAEMON 3D

Year 1998
Publisher Athena
Developer Athena

THE DEZAEMON GAMES are a series of shoot 'em up creation tools designed to let players make their own schmups using a fairly complicated series of menus. Whereas previous entries in the series focused on sprite-based games, the N64 version – the fifth in the series – makes the jump to polygons, letting players create their own models and set their own camera angles (though the action has to remain on a fixed plane). The software includes three sample games designed to show what can be pulled off, but the cartridge space limitations mean players can only store five stages, ten polygonal models, ten textures and five pieces of music, and there's no way to distribute your game when you're done. ■

FACT

The game was planned to have 64DD support, which would have greatly increased storage space and would potentially have let players upload their games to share them with others.

DORAEMON: NOBITA TO MITTSU NO SEIREISEKI

Year 1997
Publisher Epoch
Developer Epoch

THERE'S A GOOD chance that even if you don't live in Japan you may still be familiar with Doraemon, one of the country's most popular manga, anime and film characters. There were three Doraemon games released on the N64 in Japan, and the first tells the story of three sacred Fairy Spirit Stones which have been shattered, its pieces scattered around the world. It's up to Doraemon and four of his friends to find the pieces before an evil demon can use them to take over the world. Players can switch between Doraemon and his pals, each of whom have their own abilities, while Doraemon himself can collect upgrades that let him fly or breathe underwater. ■

FACT

The original *Doraemon* manga series ran between 1969 and 1996, and consisted of 1,344 stories separated into 45 volumes.

DORAEMON 2: NOBITA TO HIKARI NO SHINDEN

Year 1998
Publisher Epoch
Developer Epoch

TRANSLATED AS NOBITA and the Temple of Light, the second N64 Doraemon game builds on its predecessor by offering improved visuals, more cutscenes and more voice acting. After using Doraemon's time machine to visit an ancient world, Noby reveals to his friends that he's taken a shiny crystal with him. Turns out that's a big no-no in the world of time travel, and before they know it Noby and his chums have been teleported by the crystal into a new world which is teetering on the brink of total darkness. It's up to Doraemon and chums to save this land so they can get back to their own world. One of the newer features is a day/night cycle like that in Ocarina of Time. ■

FACT

Doraemon's certainly been around: at the time of writing he's starred in over 2,500 anime episodes, more than 40 movies and over 100 video games. Good luck collecting all of those.

DORAEMON 3: NOBITA NO MACHI SOS!

Year 2000
Publisher Epoch
Developer Epoch

AFTER NOBY SEES a comet falling from the sky, he meets up with his three friends and discovers that they each found a piece of the comet. When all three pieces are joined together, a huge explosion sends Noby flying, and suddenly his entire town is uprooted and floats into the sky. The town is whisked away to a mysterious planet inhabited by hostile robots and animals, so Noby and Doraemon decide to head out and find Noby's three friends so they can try to get to the bottom of what's going on. As the player progresses through each of the game's seven worlds, they find and recruit Noby's pals one by one. ■

FACT

Creator Fujiko F. Fujio says Doraemon never reaches his final goal because it would stop being interesting, 'so the hero has to be like the stripes on a barber pole: he seems to keep moving upward, but actually he stays in the same place'.

DOBUTSU NO MORI

Year 2001
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD

ALTHOUGH NINTENDO'S MUCH-LOVED Animal Crossing series began life on the GameCube in the west, in reality the first game in the series was released on the Nintendo 64 as a Japanese exclusive. That's not to say the GameCube version was a proper sequel: rather, it was more of an enhanced update to this N64 title. Like its successors, Dobutsu no Mori (which actually translates as Animal Forest) has you playing as a small boy or girl as they move to a new village. When you get there you meet Tom Nook, who gives you a place to live and a hefty deposit that you have to pay off. From there, you can explore the village as you see fit, and basically live a second life. Although the N64 game plays a lot like the GameCube version for the most part (right down to the inclusion of a real-time clock), a number of features are missing because they were added for the GameCube game. The N64 game has no museum, for example, nor does it have the Able Sisters shop, the latter meaning players can't design their own clothing and umbrellas. Mayor Tortimer isn't there, Kapp'n and his island aren't there and some of the villagers have slightly different looks. While this all makes it sounds like a lesser product – and on paper, I suppose it absolutely is – it's still important to remember that all great series have to start somewhere, and Animal Crossing started on the Nintendo 64. ■

FACT

The N64 version still has unlockable NES games, but it only has seven of them compared to 15 in the GameCube version.

EIKOU NO ST ANDREWS

Year	1996
Publisher	SETA Corporation
Developer	SETA Corporation

I MAY BE a little biased considering I'm Scottish, but it's a scientific fact that the Old Course at St Andrews is the greatest golf course in the world. SETA Corporation decided to release this Nintendo 64 golf simulation in which it's the only course in the entire game, so clearly someone there agrees with me too (after all, the title translates to The Glory of St Andrews). The course has been replicated surprisingly well for the era, right down to the sheds on the 17th hole that force you to play your tee shot over them without seeing where the ball will go, making it one of the most notorious holes in world golf. ■

FACT

The Old Course at St Andrews was established in 1552, and is considered the birthplace of golf, because the sport was played for the first time on the Links there in the early fifteenth century before it was banned for nearly 50 years.

FAMISTA 64

Year	1997
Publisher	Namco
Developer	Namco

THE ORIGINAL PRO Baseball: Family Stadium was released on the Famicom (NES) in Japan in 1986. In the years that followed the series continued to get annual releases as well as handheld and computer spin-offs, meaning by the time it arrived on the Nintendo 64 it was the 24th game in the series (though technically the 12th main entry). As well as the usual officially licensed Nippon Professional Baseball teams seen in other Japanese baseball games of the era, it also includes an interesting mode in which baseball-loving aliens have attacked the world and you have to travel around Japan, gathering the best players so you can build a team strong enough to beat them. ■

FACT

At the time of writing there have been 38 Famista games, the last of which was Pro Yakyuu Famista 2020 on the Nintendo Switch.

FUSHIGI NO DUNGEON: FURAI NO SHIREN 2: ONI SHURAI! SHIREN-JO!

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Chunsoft

BETTER KNOWN IN the west as Shiren the Wanderer 2, this is the sequel to Chunsoft's Super Famicom original. The game is part of the immensely popular Mystery Dungeon series, and sees players taking control of a young 10-year-old lad called Shiren who has to defend the village of Natane from a bunch of demons who've attacked. As in other Mystery Dungeon games, players explore a series of randomly generated dungeons which are made up of numerous rooms. The aim is to find the exit on each dungeon to reach the next floor, while battling the enemies that are roaming around. In this particular game, players also need to find building materials so they can build a castle to protect the town. ■

FACT

There have been nearly 30 Mystery Dungeon games, including spin-off games based on other series like Pokémon, Final Fantasy and Etrian Odyssey.

GETTER LOVE!! CHOU RENAI PARTY GAME TANJOU

Year	1998
Publisher	Hudson Soft
Developer	Hudson Soft

YOU KNOW, IT'S just stereotypical to claim that Japan's video game libraries are full of visual novels about dating. Sometimes they're board games about dating instead. Getter Love!! is the prime example of this: the title calls itself a 'Very Romantic Party Game' for a reason. Playing as a high school student, you have to compete with your other high school pals to be the first to win the heart of the girl you have a crush on. Instead of using dice, the game uses a special system called SAMS, where all the players are controlled simultaneously to save time. You have two weeks to win over your girl of choice, which seems a bit short but hey, Getter Love!! knows best. ■

FACT

The title screen says 'Panda Love Unit' underneath the title. You can make your own joke up about that.

GOEMON MONONOKE SUGOROKU

Year	1999
Publisher	Konami
Developer	KCEK

SUGOROKU IS A board game in Japan that can be found in two different forms: one that looks similar to Backgammon, and another that's more similar to dice-based 'moving around' games like Snakes & Ladders. Mario Party is an example of the latter, and so is Goemon Mononoke Sugoroku, which stars the characters of the Goemon games (see the Mystical Ninja titles in the main section). Whereas the Mario Party titles have you playing mini-games against your opponents, however, here the player has to collect cards and use them to take part in card battles with other players. The game supports up to four players, and there are just four characters available to choose from: Goemon, Ebisumaru, Sasuke and Yae. ■

FACT

Goemon finally earned his place among the video game greats when a Goemon costume was added to Super Smash Bros. Ultimate in 2019 for Mii characters to wear.

HAMSTER MONOGATARI 64

Year	2001
Publisher	Culture Brain
Developer	Culture Brain

THE TAMAGOTCHI GAME on the N64 may have been a board game with Tamagotchi elements, but what about players who actually want a legit virtual pet experience on their console? That's where Hamster Monogatari 64 comes into play, allowing players to take care of their own little furballs without inevitably losing them when they escape from their cage and end up hiding inside the couch. You can raise up to four hamsters at a time and can take care of them in a variety of ways to make sure they grow up to be cheery little sods. You can even enter them in races and beauty pageants, though thankfully not at the same time, because nobody looks good when they're running. ■

FACT

The series actually started as Ferret Monogatari on the Game Boy Color, before Culture Brain took the informed decision to switch over to hamsters. That isn't a joke.

HARUKANARU AUGUSTA MASTERS 98

Year	1997
Publisher	T&E Soft
Developer	T&E Soft

IF YOU THOUGHT Eikou no Saint Andrews was the only N64 golf game exclusive to Japan then you'd better sit down, because I have news for you. This little fellow from golf game maestros T&E Soft focuses mainly on the Augusta National Golf Club course in Georgia, and contains a number of digitised golfers including Japanese pro Nobumitsu Yuhara. The game features the standard modes you'd expect from a single-course golf title, including Stroke Play, Match Play, Tournament and the ability to practice a single hole. There's also play-by-play from real-life golf commentator Matsushita Kenji, though of course if you don't know Japanese that isn't much use to you, unless you're really good at telling what people are thinking by the tone of their voice. ■

FACT

T&E Soft was founded in 1982 and specialised in golf and puzzle games. Its last major golf title was True Swing Golf on the DS. Its game IP was acquired by D4 Enterprise in 2019.

HEIWA PACHINKO WORLD 64

Year	1997
Publisher	Shouei System
Developer	Amtex

IF YOU AREN'T familiar with Heiwa, it's one of the world's biggest pachinko machine manufacturers. And when I say 'the world's' I pretty much mean 'Japan's' because pachinko is clearly significantly more popular in its home country. As in the real-life gambling game, players buy a bunch of small steel balls and feed them through the machine, turning a handle to change the angle at which they're fired in. The balls then drop down, changing direction as they land on various pins, and you then get rewards if they land in certain areas. There are three pachinko parlours to visit in the game, and four real-life tables have been recreated, including the curiously named Beautiful Girls 2 (sorry if you preferred the first one). ■

FACT

Heiwa started making pachinko machines in 1949. The name means 'peace' because its founder Kenkichi Nakajima wanted to start a company that made products that had nothing to do with war.

IDE YOSUKE NO MAHJONG JUKU

Year 2000
Publisher SETA Corporation
Developer SETA Corporation

JAPAN AND MAHJONG video games go together like… well, Japan and pachinko video games. There are a bunch of mahjong games on the N64 alone, but not all of them feature Yosuke Ide, a well-known mahjong expert. Rather than simply letting you play mahjong without any other bells or whistles, the game has a story mode where the player takes part in mahjong games with the Murakamis, a family of mahjong fans who discuss the game and its various quirks as they play. Opponents' facial expressions change depending on how well they're doing, so you can try to read their face to figure out what tiles they have. Naturally, Ide's at hand to give some pro lessons too, otherwise why would he even be there. ■

FACT

Ide first played Mahjong on his dad's lap at the age of five. He grew up teaching his classmates how to play and his University of Tokyo graduation thesis was called *The Sociology of Mahjong*. He's well into it, basically.

ITOI SHIGESATO NO BASS TSURI NO 1 KETTEHAN!

Year 2000
Publisher Nintendo
Developer HAL Laboratory

THIS FISHING GAME was originally released on the Super Famicom (the Japanese SNES) and included support for its Satellaview add-on, which could broadcast special time-limited tournaments to players. This Nintendo 64 port claims to be the Kettehan (Definitive Edition), but it's actually a complete remake with fishing sections now in 3D. Shigesato, best known for being the creator of Earthbound, decided to release the game to capitalise on a bass fishing boom in Japan, and added some comedy cartoon characters to the mix to make learning about fishing a bit more appealing. It's said that Nintendo may have overestimated the game's potential appeal, and made far too many copies: as such, it's one of the cheaper Japanese N64 games to find. ■

FACT

ASCII Corporation released a special controller for the game called the Tsurikon 64 (which literally means Fishing Controller).

J-LEAGUE DYNAMITE SOCCER 64

Year 1997
Publisher Imagineer
Developer A-Max

WHEN PEOPLE THINK of Nintendo 64 football games they immediately tend to think of Konami and EA's various efforts, so over time most others have fallen by the wayside a little. Imagineer's J-League Dynamite Soccer is one such game, which is a bit of a shame because it's actually a bit of a gem, all things considered. The game has a vertically scrolling viewpoint similar to the early SNES title Super Soccer, and features pleasantly smooth player animations. It also has the official J-League licence, meaning all 17 clubs are officially licensed. In an interesting touch, though, the photos of all 272 players are also included and appear at the bottom of the screen when a player has the ball. ■

FACT

The J-League, or the Japan Professional Football League to give it its full name, was only founded in 1992, so all these J-League games are a testament to its early success.

J-LEAGUE ELEVEN BEAT 1997

Year 1997
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

RELEASED JUST ONE month after Dynamite Soccer, Hudson Soft's take on J-League football put its own interesting spin on things and also remains an entertaining game to play. The key word there is 'spin', because the game's default camera angle has a tendency to rotate around to follow the action, which can be a little disorientating at first but is eventually fine. It too features the full J-League licence – as you'll soon see, the J-League was handing its licence out like glowsticks at a rave – but here you can also put together your own Japan national team by choosing which players from the 17 club teams should be included. As you can tell by the screenshot, it's a more light-hearted game too, with chubby cartoon players. ■

FACT

Kashima Antlers and Yokohama F. Marinos are the only two teams in Japan to have remained in the top J1 League ever since the J-League was founded.

J-LEAGUE LIVE 64

Year 1997
Publisher Electronic Arts Victor
Developer Electronic Arts Victor

ALTHOUGH ELECTRONIC ARTS was committed to supporting the Nintendo 64 with sports titles, it was also conscious that if it wanted to sell as many copies as possible it would need to do well in Japan too, and FIFA 64 may not the solution to that (after all, it only featured five western leagues, and nobody in the Hokkaido region would have really wanted to play New York vs Vancouver). The solution was J-League Live 64, a completely separate football game for Japan that used a modified version of the FIFA engine but ditched the European and North American clubs for the officially licensed J-League teams: logos, players and all. ■

FACT

The game features a slightly bizarre font for its 'kick-off', 'throw-in', 'goal' etc. messages. It uses chunky, multi-coloured letters that look like a toddler's building blocks.

J-LEAGUE TACTICS SOCCER

Year 1999
Publisher ASCII Entertainment
Developer ASCII Entertainment

IF YOU LIKE your Japanese football games but you aren't very skilful then perhaps a Japanese football management game is more your cup of sake. J-League Tactics Soccer has you taking on your favourite J-League team – or, if you don't know any, the one with the best mascot – and trying to guide them to glory. You can even take charge of the Japan national team and try to make them world champions, if your ambition goes that high. The game looks suspiciously like Konami's Perfect Striker / ISS series right down to some of the character animations, but there don't appear to be any signs that Konami were involved in any way. ■

FACT

If you want to give the game a bit of a personal touch, you can create four players and bring them with you when you start managing your first team.

JANGO SIMULATION MAHJONG-DO 64

Year 1997
Publisher Video System
Developer Art

OF ALL THE mahjong games on the Nintendo 64, this is certainly one of them. There's at least a bit of a story to this one: you have to choose from 16 different characters (each presented as a manga-style illustration), then take on the other 15 in a series of four-player mahjong battles in an attempt to become the best of the bunch. The tiles here are polygonal, allowing the camera to swoop around during particularly dramatic moments. Each character also has their own background, adding a little more personality to the game: a couple of them are mahjong hustlers, for example, while some are professional mahjong players. Oh, and one of them's an exorcist, because why not. ■

FACT

The 'Jango' part of the title translates roughly as 'sparrow' in Japanese. In China, mahjong was originally known as 'máquè', which also translates to 'sparrow'.

JIKKYOU GI STABLE

Year 1999
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEN

KONAMI'S N64 TAKE on horse racing is a surprisingly detailed one and sees you getting involved in every aspect of the process. As a new horse trainer, it's your job to train and race horses that are given to you by a series of owners. Over time you can take part in bigger races like the Japan derby and overseas GI events. As well as simply racing the horses, you also get to take care of them in the stables, run your farm and attend markets where horses can be auctioned. In between races, the story is presented to you in a manner not unlike an RPG, with a number of detailed environments seen from an isometric viewpoint with lovely pixel art. ■

FACT

GI is the grade given to the highest level of thoroughbred and standardbred stakes races in most countries. In the UK and Europe it's known as G1 instead.

JIKKYOU J-LEAGUE PERFECT STRIKER

Year 1996
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

ALTHOUGH THE WEST'S first major N64 football game was International Superstar Soccer 64, six months earlier it had been released in Japan under a different guise. Rather than including a bunch of international teams, J-League Perfect Striker instead featured (you guessed it) the official J-League licence, with all 16 teams, their correct kits and all the real players (complete with little photos of their faces that appear during goals and fouls). The game's main mode is J-League Challenge, which is essentially a full league season with 30 matches (playing each team twice). Winning the league unlocks a special match, which can unlock three hidden teams called Japan Dreams, World Dreams and World Stars. ■

FACT

In an interview with *GamePro* magazine before the N64 launched, Shigeru Miyamoto was asked what he thought about third-party games. 'Konami's soccer game may be better than our games,' he said. 'It looks really good.'

JIKKYOU J-LEAGUE 1999: PERFECT STRIKER 2

Year 1999
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

JUST AS THE original J-League Perfect Striker was the Japanese version of International Superstar Soccer 64, so too was Perfect Striker 2 the J-League equivalent of ISS 2000. As before, the game includes the full suite of J-League teams, although this time players could also choose any team from the J2 league, the Japanese second division. Other than this, the only noticeable difference between Perfect Striker 2 and ISS 2000 was the sound: as well as the obvious Japanese commentary, each team had their own unique chants, which wasn't the case in the west. The game also includes the story mode that featured in the European version of ISS 2000 (but not the North American one). ■

FACT

Konami saw more success with its J-League Winning Eleven series (the Japanese equivalent of Pro Evolution Soccer). Sixteen J-League games were released before Konami stopped the series in 2010.

JIKKYOU POWERFUL PRO YAKYUU 4

Year 1997
Publisher Konami
Developer Diamond Head

KONAMI WASN'T JUST renowned among sports fans for its fantastic recreations of football: since 1994 it's also been a giant in the world of baseball games. After releasing the first three Powerful Pro Yakyuu games on the Super Famicom, the fourth entry was released exclusively on the Nintendo 64. Just as many American baseball games have the MLB and MLBPA licences, Powerful Pro Yakyuu 4 has both the Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) and Japan Professional Baseball Players Association (JPBPA) licences, meaning all of its teams, players and stadiums are accurate. Well, as accurate as they can be given that the players are comically chunky and have no arms, as is the series' trademark art style. ■

FACT

There have been more than 25 Jikkyou Powerful Pro games released over the years. At the time of writing the last was eBaseball Powerful Pro Baseball 2020 on the Switch and PS4.

JIKKYOU POWERFUL PRO YAKYUU 5

Year 1998
Publisher Konami
Developer Diamond Head

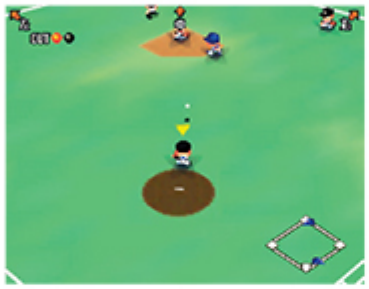
THE FIFTH GAME in the Powerful Pro Yakyuu series introduces a Scenario mode, which recreates 12 moments from the real-life 1998 season. Like its predecessor, the game's main mode is called Success, and is a story mode where you make your own little chap and take them through the life of a baseball player. Whereas the fourth game's Success mode started you off as a pro right away, this time players start off as a school student learning the ropes, and have to work their way up to the pro levels. Since it's set at school, there's also a greater emphasis on finding love, because everyone knows a baseball game isn't worth playing if there isn't a chance to flirt in it. ■

FACT

In case you're wondering why all these Konami sports games are called Jikkyou, it roughly means 'Live', to suggest they're being presented like a TV sports broadcast.

JIKKYOU POWERFUL PRO YAKYUU 6

Year 1999
Publisher Konami
Developer Diamond Head



THE SIXTH GAME in the Powerful Pro Yakyuu series doesn't mess around too much with the gameplay, but it does offer yet another different take on Success mode. This time you're a university student playing for one of six university teams. While your aim is still to eventually become a pro, this time the mode throws in more life simulation aspects by adding the concept of money, meaning you have to juggle working a part-time job to pay the bills while still finding time to play baseball. The other main addition to the sixth game is a Home Run Derby mode, allowing players to practice their batting skills by trying to rack up the highest score they can. ■

FACT

The six universities you choose between in Success mode have interesting names, which roughly translate to Powerful, Dawn, Buddhist Temple, Passionate, Bureaucratic and Surimi (fish paste).

JIKKYOU POWERFUL PRO YAKYUU 2000

Year 2000
Publisher Konami
Developer Diamond Head

BY THE TURN of the millennium Konami was beginning to shift its focus away from the Nintendo 64 and so the main numbered Powerful Pro Yakyuu series moved over to the PlayStation 2, which received part 7. Instead, the N64 got a 2000 edition which once again got a different Success mode, though this time it was one ported over from a PlayStation spin-off. Instead of messing around with all that high school and college nonsense, this time the Success mode has you playing as a graduate who's working for a business (there are four to choose from). The aim is to play for your company's baseball team and get good enough to eventually become noticed by a pro team. ■

FACT

One of the four fictional companies you can choose to work for, Dosukoi Brewery, consists entirely of very overweight players. 'Dosukoi' is a word often associated with sumo wrestlers in Japan.

JIKKYOU POWERFUL PRO YAKYUU BASIC-BAN 2001

Year 2001
Publisher Konami
Developer Diamond Head

BY THIS POINT Konami had pretty much lost interest in the Nintendo 64 (as had everyone else, to be fair), but it did still knock out this title right near the end of the console's life. The Basic-ban in the title is the most important one here, because this version ditches a lot of the modes that made previous titles so successful. There's no Success mode at all, and the Dramatic Pennant Mode – which was similar to a normal tournament but let you train your players first – was also removed. As a result it's considered the worst of the series on N64 and the sales backed this up: with only 110,000 copies sold it performed worse than any of the others. ■

FACT

Powerful Pro Yakyuu 6, 2000 and Basic-ban 2001 all have Transfer Pak support, in which those who owned the series' Game Boy spin-off titles could transfer players over to the N64 game.

JIKKYOU WORLD SOCCER 3

Year 1997
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

ALTHOUGH J-LEAGUE PERFECT Striker was the Japanese equivalent of International Superstar Soccer 64, it's not like the Japanese are completely disinterested in world football, especially that involving national teams. Jikkyou World Soccer 3, then, is basically ISS 64 translated back to Japanese, allowing players to take part in the western game's international shenanigans. It isn't actually identical, though: eight European teams have been ditched from the western game (goodbye Scotland, Wales, Rep Ireland, Northern Ireland, Poland, Greece, Belgium and Austria) and replaced with different ones (hello Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Paraguay, Bolivia, Canada, Yugoslavia and Australia). While it's basically the same game otherwise, the loss of Scotland obviously makes it drastically inferior (and I say that carefully as a man with a Canadian wife). ■

FACT

In case you're wondering, the first two Jikkyou World Soccer titles were the Japanese versions of ISS and ISS Deluxe on the SNES.

JIKKYOU WORLD SOCCER: WORLD CUP FRANCE 98

Year 1998
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO

WHEN EA ACQUIRED the licence to make games based on the FIFA World Cup, that licence didn't extend to Japan. Instead, it was actually Konami that would get the rights there, leading to a glorious moment for fans of its football games: for the first and only time, players could enjoy an official World Cup game created by Konami rather than EA. While PlayStation owners were given an official World Cup version of ISS Pro 98, Nintendo 64 players instead got ISS 98 with lovely France 98 branding slapped all over it. This also meant that, for the first time outside of its J-League games, Konami was able to provide a football game with real player names (albeit written in Japanese katakana script). ■

FACT

Japan didn't have the best time at France 98. It lost 1-0 to Argentina, lost 1-0 to Croatia then lost 2-1 to Jamaica, making it one of only two teams (along with USA) to lose all three group games.

JINSEI GAME 64

Year 1999
Publisher Takara
Developer Takara

AS PREVIOUSLY EXPLAINED in the entry for Bakushou Jinsei 64, Jinsei Game is the Japanese equivalent of The Game of Life. Whereas Taito's game was something of an 'inspired' knock-off, however, Jinsei Game 64 is an official video game adaptation by Takara, the company responsible for the actual board game. It's a four-player game in which players can either choose to compete solo, or team up in 'married' pairs. Players can also get different jobs as they play, including the likes of manga artist, pet shop owner, game developer, pro wrestler and 'meat shop' owner. There are also a few mini-games in there to make things interesting, including one where you all spin around and try to knock each other over. You know, like in real life. ■

FACT

Takara first started selling Jinsei Game in 1967. There have been over 40 different video game versions of it released over the years.

KIRA TTO KAIKETSU! 64 TANTEIDAN

Year 1998
Publisher Imagineer
Developer Pandora Box

ROUGHLY TRANSLATED AS Shining and Solving! 64 Detective Club, this isn't a mystery adventure or anything like that but is instead yet another board game, this time featuring a bunch of kid detectives. The game is set in a giant mansion, and each time you play the mansion is randomly generated, with anything from 3–10 rooms. The main aim is to search the furniture in the mansion to try and find whatever item the game rules have you looking for (be that cards, bombs or whatever the mansion's residents request). As you roll the dice and explore the mansion you can also get into fights if you land on the same space as another player. Makes sense: all board games end with children fighting. ■

FACT

There are five characters to choose from: two 11-year-olds (an all-rounder and a smart one), a 14-year-old (who can fight best), a 15-year old (who's the fastest) and a robot dog (who doesn't do much at first but can be levelled up quicker).

LAST LEGION UX

Year 1999
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Yuke's

IF YOU'VE BEEN scanning this section looking for potential fun Japanese games to try out, let me just save you the time and point enthusiastically at Last Legion UX. This is a mech fighting game in the style of Sega's Virtual On series, and has you initially choosing between six different mechs (though a further six can be unlocked). The Story mode is naturally all in Japanese but is still fully playable to westerners because it ultimately amounts to you destroying a series of mechs in one-on-battles in large arenas where you can freely roam around. Each mech has its own unique weaponry and abilities, and there's also a deeply satisfying one-hit kill move where, if you're good enough, you can pull your opponent's power core out. ■

FACT

One of the best hidden characters in the game is Bomberon, which is basically a big mech piloted by Bomberman. There's also Metal Bomber, which is a giant metallic statue of Bomberman.

MAHJONG 64

Year 1997
Publisher Koei
Developer Chat Noir

ONE OF THE earliest mahjong games released for the Nintendo 64, Mahjong 64 is set in a special mahjong school, where your aim is to learn how to play the game and take part in a series of tournaments in the hope of eventually graduating (though I'm not really sure what you do with a degree in mahjong). There are 18 other characters to play against, but you rarely see them during actual competition: instead, they all seem to be represented by a creepy hand with oddly long fingers. If you don't know how to play mahjong and you like the idea of a game that teaches you the basics, you may still be best to look elsewhere because there are reams of Japanese text here. ■

FACT

If you want to learn how to play mahjong, the Switch game 51 Worldwide Games (known as Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics in North America) includes Japanese mahjong and a guide on how to play it.

MAHJONG HOUROUKI CLASSIC

Year 1997
Publisher Imagineer
Developer Alpha Unit

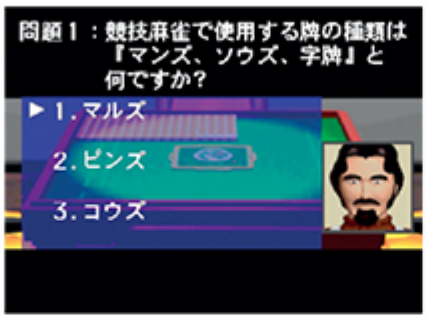
THIS MAHJONG TITLE is a little different because it's actually based on an existing brand. *Mahjong Hourouki* (or Mahjong Wandering Story, as a voice says in English on the title screen) was originally a four-part novel by 'Tetsuya Asada' released in 1969, before getting various manga and anime adaptations (including two movies in 1984 and 2019). You play as Boyatetsu, a vagabond who's been working in a factory after Japan's defeat in the Second World War. He soon enters the world of mahjong gambling and tries to turn his life around. Mahjong Hourouki Classic's most interesting feature is the ability to cheat by attempting to shuffle the tiles in a way that guarantees you a good hand (though you can get caught, of course). ■

FACT

The book is basically an autobiography of Takehiro Irokawa, who used a pen name. He lived a life of mahjong gambling and crime before cleaning up his act, but also suffered from hallucinations later in his life.

MAHJONG MASTER

Year 1996
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEO



EVERY GENRE HAS to start somewhere, and Mahjong Master was the first of the roughly 14,000 mahjong games released on the Nintendo 64 in Japan. Konami's effort is a fairly straightforward affair but there's also a story mode in there where you have 19 different characters you can take on, each of whom is represented by a slightly off-putting polygonal character who barely moves. You can also choose from one of seven characters to play as, including high school girl Hatsune and brothel madam Eriko (which gives a new meaning to a night on the tiles). As well as the story and one-off battle modes there's also a quiz mode where you're challenged on your mahjong knowledge. ■

FACT

One of the characters is E.D. Perpin, an American who looks suspiciously like Eddie Murphy and yells excitedly in katakana, saying the likes of 'I'm from the west side, here we go'.

MARIO NO PHOTOPI

Year 1998
Publisher Tokyo Electron
Developer Nintendo / Datt Japan / Fuji Photo Film

MARIO NO PHOTOPI is another creative package similar to Mario Paint on the SNES and the Mario Artist games on the 64DD, but this time the emphasis is on photo editing. The cartridge itself actually has two slots on the top of it, which support SmartMedia cards (which were basically an early ancestor of what would become SD cards). By saving photos to a SmartMedia card from a digital camera or a PC, players could then import them into Mario no Photopi and edit them, play a jigsaw game with them, or create things like postcards and business cards with them. These could then be written back to the SmartMedia card so users could print them out. A clever idea for its time. ■

FACT

A series of special SmartMedia cards were released to tie in with the game, including imagery from the likes of The Legend of Zelda, Bomberman and Sylvanian Families.

MORITA SHOGI 64

Year	1998
Publisher	SETA Corporation
Developer	SETA Corporation

MARIO NO PHOTOPI wasn't the only Japanese Nintendo 64 cartridge to feature its own unique little port. Morita Shogi 64 was the sequel to launch title Saikyou Habu Shogi and included an AI program by famous Shogi player Kazuo Morita (hence the name). The most interesting feature, however, was a modem connection port built into the cartridge: this let players connect online and take on other players. While the concept of online multiplayer was undoubtedly a very cool thing for the time, in recent years the cartridge has taken on a new lease of life, as one intrepid hacker discovered that a PC can be used to send data through the port and run homebrew games on the N64. ■

FACT

Kazuo Morita was the founder of developer Random House (not the book company). His name was attached to a number of other titles, such as Kazuo Morita's Shogi on the Famciom and Kazuo Morita's Othello on the MSX.

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

Year	1999
Publisher	Bandai Games
Developer	BEC

THE 1995 ANIME *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is considered one of the most iconic series in history, and is often credited with revitalising a slump in the anime industry. This naturally led to a host of video games (more than 20 at the time of writing), of which this Nintendo 64 offering was the seventh. For the most part it's a one-on-one fighting game where the player relives many of the big battles from the series, as well as the 1997 movie *The End of Evangelion*. While there are some sections where the aim is to shoot down an approaching enemy in a first person lightgun shooter style perspective, the majority of the game focuses on 2.5D fighting with slightly clunky controls. ■

FACT

If you're keen to get into *Neon Genesis Evangelion* but don't want to commit a lot of time, you're in luck: it only had 26 episodes and a movie.

NINTAMA RANTAROU 64 GAME GALLERY

Year	2000
Publisher	Culture Brain
Developer	Culture Brain

NINTAMA RANTAROU IS the second longest-running anime series of all time in Japan, having started in April 1993 and, at the time of writing, continued for well over 2,000 episodes. Because it's mainly aimed at children, most of its video game adaptations have been quite simplistic, and Game Gallery is no exception. Tree are three mini-games to choose from: one has you dropping panels to fit them into silhouettes, the second has you pushing and pulling cubes to move them into the right place and the third is a sliding jigsaw puzzle. As far as content goes, this is easily one of the lightest offerings on the Nintendo 64 and is probably best avoided. ■

FACT

If you're curious, the longest-running anime series in Japan is *Sazae-san*, which started in 1969 and is still ongoing as of 2022.

NUSHI TSURI 64

Year	1998
Publisher	Pack-In Soft
Developer	DDL

THE NUSHI TSURI series is better known as the River King series, and offers an experience that's part RPG, part fishing simulator. It basically does for fishing what Harvest Moon does for farming. You choose between six different characters at the start of the game: each of them has their own plot but it all boils down to them needing to eventually catch a different legendary fish. Although there's an ending, the game is still fairly open-ended and players can explore and fish freely. There's also the opportunity to catch bugs and do a spot of gardening, and you'll even get into fights with the occasional wild animal, so there's certainly more to this one than a bog-standard fishing sim. ■

FACT

The game has Transfer Pak support for Game Boy title Umi no Nushi Tsuri 2. Plug your cart in and you'll be able to view the fish you caught in the handheld game in 3D, as well as unlock a special rod in the N64 game.

NUSHI TSURI 64: SHIOKAZE NI NOTTE

Year 2000
Publisher Victor Interactive
Developer Victor Interactive

THE SEQUEL TO Nushi Tsuri 64, Shiokaze ni Notte presents an entirely new story, this time about a family of four who live on a small island in the North Sea and are called on by 'a guardian spirit' to go on a fishing journey that eventually takes them to the South Seas. This time you can choose to play as the older brother, younger sister, mum or dad, and again each of them has their own unique goal (the mother, for example, read about a certain type of fish in a cooking magazine so she wants to catch and cook it). There are seven different types of fishing this time: lure fishing, live bait fishing, float fishing, weight fishing, throw fishing, fly fishing and even trawling. ■

FACT

The Tsurikon 64 fishing rod controller released for Itoi Shigesato no Bass Trusi No 1 Kettehan! works here too, in case you were really trying to get your money's worth from it.

ONEGAI MONSTERS

Year 1999
Publisher Bottom Up
Developer Bottom Up

THIS INTERESTING RPG seemingly spawned as a result of both the Pokémon and Tamagotchi crazes combined. You play as a young lad who's inherited his dad's ability to telepathically communicate with monsters, and on his 10th birthday he's finally given a monster of his own. The aim is to become a top Monster Breeder: not to win battles as in Pokémon, but by helping out townsfolk. Your initial monster is just a tiny blob, who'll evolve into a different type of monster depending on what types of food you feed it (which is where the Tamagotchi element comes into play). There are a total of 500 different types of monster, so it's fair to say there's a surprising degree of depth to this one. ■

FACT

Onegai roughly translates as 'wish' or 'request'. The term 'onegaishimasu' in Japanese means 'please do this for me'.

PACHINKO 365 NICHI

Year 1998
Publisher SETA Corporation
Developer SETA Corporation

PLAYING PACHINKO IS one thing, but if you're something of an obsessive then Pachinko 365 Nichi may be the one for you. The aim is to visit your three local pachinko parlours every day for an entire year, talking to the regulars and trying to earn as much money in total as you can.

There are five machines included – CR Peach Pie V, CR Ryu-Oh, CR Sai Koron, Zero Tiger and Center Chu Stone – and as well as the main mode there's also a needlessly detailed 'research mode' where you can study each table and even tighten individual pegs to see how it affects your chances of winning. This probably isn't the healthiest representation of gambling out there, to be honest. ■

FACT

While the other four machines in the game are from the '90s, the Center Chu Stone machine dates back to the early '50s and is therefore much more basic.

PARLOR! PRO 64: PACHINKO JIKKI SIMULATION

Year 1999
Publisher Telenet Japan
Developer Irem / Telenet Japan

WHILE IT COULD be argued that Pachinko 365 Nichi is the definitive pachinko game for die-hard devotees, Parlor! Pro 64 has a similarly obsessive attention to detail, albeit with fewer machines on offer. This one offers recreations of three different Sanyo pachinko machines, namely Mr Gen the Carpenter, Sparkling Paradise and Million Slot 6 (sorry if you're a fan of the previous five Million Slot games, you're out of luck here). As well as a Story mode where you try to earn money from the machines, this also has a similar mode to 365 Nichi's where you can adjust the pins and study graphs showing the results of each tweak you make. You can even view each machine's video animations separately. ■

FACT

According to Pachinko Planet, Sanyo pachinko machines from the '70s are fairly common to find in the west, but importers often removed all the electronics before selling them, so finding a complete working one is rare.

PD ULTRAMAN BATTLE COLLECTION 64

Year 1999
Publisher Bandai Games
Developer Bandai

THE LEGENDARY JAPANESE superhero Ultraman has understandably appeared in more than 100 video games over the years, but Battle Collection 64 is probably the one with the most interesting gimmick. The game is a strategy title in which you train and level up tiny 'chibi' versions of Ultraman characters to try and win fighting tournaments. While these characters can be earned through the game itself, the far more interesting way of acquiring them is by using the Transfer Pak. By putting in literally any Game Boy cartridge – yes, any one at all – the game will read its data and use that to generate a character and their stats for you. While the game itself was criticised for being a tad dull, this was certainly novel. ■

FACT

The original 1966 *Ultraman* TV show only had 39 episodes, but it spawned a bunch of series over the decades including *Ultraseven*, *Ultraman Ace*, *Ultraman 80*, *Ultraman Gaia* and *Ultraman Cosmos*.

POCKET MONSTERS' STADIUM

Year 1998
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Laboratory

IF YOU THOUGHT the Pokémon Stadium we got in the west was the first game in the series, you might want to sit down. The Japanese version of that game is actually called Pokémon Stadium 2, because nine months earlier it received its Japan-only predecessor, Pocket Monsters' Stadium. The concept was the same: players could use a Transfer Pak to import their Game Boy Pokémon and use them in 3D battles. The problem was, this first game was seriously lacking in one respect: it didn't actually support all 151 Pokémon. Instead, only 42 Pokémon could actually be used in battles, while the other 109 could only be viewed in 3D in the game's Pokédex section. So we didn't miss out on much. ■

FACT

Nintendo's late president Satoru Iwata ported the Game Boy battle system over to Pokémon Stadium in about a week. *Pokémon* director Shigeki Morimoto once joked that when he heard about it he thought 'what kind of company president is this?'

POWER LEAGUE 64

Year 1997
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

HUDSON SOFT'S POWER League was a series of baseball games mostly released on the PC Engine (aka TurboGrafix-16) and Super Famicom. Power League 64 was the eleventh(!) game in the series and the first to be presented in polygonal 3D instead of sprites. It was also the first realistic baseball game on the N64 (the previous two released on the system had cartoony visuals). The game features all 12 officially licensed Nippon Professional Baseball teams and all their real-life stadia, so if you fancied pitting the Nippon-Ham Fighters against the Yakult Swallows in a big food-sponsored showdown then you absolutely could. The game also included a handful of fictional teams, including the Dolphins, who were sponsored by *Family Computer Magazine*. ■

FACT

Other NPB teams named after owners include the Yokohama DeNA BayStars, the Fukoka SoftBank Hawks, the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles and the Sapporo Multi-Grain Cheerios Dragons. I may have made the last one up.

PRO MAHJONG KIWAME 64

Year 1997
Publisher Athena
Developer Athena

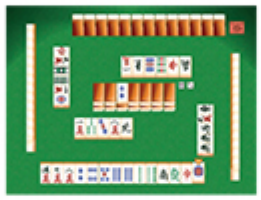
I APPRECIATE IT'S been a full three pages since we last saw a mahjong game, so thankfully Pro Mahjong Kiwame 64 is here to break the drought. The 'Pro' in the title is the main word here, because rather than facing off against fictional characters, here you take on 16 real-life professional mahjong players, including Masahito Iida (sometimes nicknamed the White Whale and considered by some to be the greatest of all time), and Masateru Kaneku, aka the Cat (because he often sits there for a long time not moving, not because he brings mouse heads home to his family every night). The game also includes a quiz mode which shows you a hand and asks you which tile you think you should discard. ■

FACT

Masahito Iida played in the A League of the Japanese Professional Mahjong League for 28 years, which is longer than any other player in history. He was planning a comeback but sadly died of cancer at 63.

PRO MAHJONG TSUWAMONO 64: JANSOU BATTLE NI CHOUSEN

Year	1999
Publisher	Culture Brain
Developer	Culture Brain



WITH UMPTEEN MAHJONG games to choose from on the Nintendo 64, this one is similar to Pro Mahjong Kiwame in that it also includes real players. The title roughly translates to Pro Mahjong Soldier 64: Mahjong House Battle Challenge, but don't start expecting any sort of combat here, it's still a straightforward mahjong title with six different mahjong parlours to play in, with such names as Animal House, Flying Dragon and Distinguished Citizen (which definitely doesn't sound like a front for anything else). The 16 pros – there's some crossover with Kiwame – have been accurately recreated, right down to their playing style and personalities, meaning you really do feel like you're competing against part-player part-model Yoko Watanabe, or the controversial Yudai 'Hell's Gatekeeper' Maehara. ■

FACT

Maehara has said he doesn't like the Hell's Gatekeeper nickname. According to him, whether it's heaven or hell, gatekeepers aren't generally great people.

PUYO PUYO SUN 64

Year	1997
Publisher	Compile
Developer	Compile

PUYO PUYO SUN is the third main game in the hugely popular Puyo Puyo puzzle series, and has a slightly silly story in which Satan, after reading about a tropical island in a holiday magazine, decides he'd like to get a tan and so he uses his special Devil powers to make the sun larger (could've saved a lot of hassle by just flying to Malta). Cue a story mode where the aim is to stop him. The main new mechanic in Puyo Puyo Sun is the addition of Sun Puyo, which appear whenever you clear the screen. If you can clear a Sun Puyo as part of a combo, the number of Nuisance (clear) Puyo that appear on your opponent's screen increases. ■

FACT

The game's title isn't just literal, it's a pun too. 'San' means 'three' in Japan, so Puyo Puyo Sun sounds a lot like 'Puyo Puyo San'.

PUYO PUYO-N PARTY

Year	1999
Publisher	Compile
Developer	Compile

IN 1998 SEGA took over ownership of the Puyo Puyo franchise (though Compile continued as developer), which means this is the only N64 game to have a tiny bit of input from Nintendo's old rival. The fourth game in the series, Puyo Puyo-n Party introduces 'super attacks', which let players easily clear Puyo on their screen, or sometimes make things trickier for their opponent instead. The 'Party' in the title is the other main element, as players can now take part in big four-player battles (which admittedly lose a lot of graphical detail due to the display resolutions at the time). Players can also use the Transfer Pak to connect to the Game Boy Color version of Puyo Puyo Sun and unlock new backgrounds. ■

FACT

Once again the title is a pun (albeit not as good this time), as 'yon' is Japanese for 'four'.

ROBOT PONKOTTSU 64: NANATSU NO UMI NO CARAMEL

Year	1999
Publisher	Hudson Soft
Developer	Red Company

THE ORIGINAL ROBOT Ponkottsu (or Robopon, as its fans call it) was a fairly shameless Pokémon imitation released on the Game Boy Color in 1998. A year later it got a special edition (its equivalent of Pokemon Yellow, if you will) alongside this Nintendo 64 spin-off. Rather than doing a Pokémon Stadium and simply focuses on the gimmick of turning a GBC game polygonal, Robopon 64 adds a whole new plot which involves sailing around a large world made of water, and taking part in robo-battles with pirates along the way. Whereas the handheld game featured turn-based battles (again, like Pokémon), here players can move their Robopon around freely in a 3D arena. ■

FACT

Although Robopon 64 was never released in the west, the Game Boy Color original and its Game Boy Advance sequel were. The latter is considered the most entertaining game by far.

SAIKYO HABU SHOGI

Year 1996
Publisher SETA Corporation
Developer SETA Corporation

IF YOU'RE EVER at a pub quiz and you're asked what the N64's third launch title was in Japan along with Super Mario 64 and Pilotwings 64, you must do two things. The first thing you should do is confidently answer 'Saikyo Habu Shogi', because that's the answer: translated as Strongest Habu Shogi, it's an N64 rendition of the chess-like game Shogi, containing a guest appearance by Yoshihiru Habu, who was Japan's greatest Shogi player (and therefore the world's greatest) at the time, having won all seven major Shogi championships in the year the game was released. The second thing you should do is thank your quizmaster for asking such a wonderfully niche question. ■

FACT

A potentially even nerdier fact is that Saikyo Habu Shogi was the first N64 game to use the Controller Pak to save games. One save took up its entire 123-page storage, which seems a bit much.

SD HIRYU NO KEN DENSETSU

Year 1999
Publisher Culture Brain
Developer Culture Brain

FLIP ALL THE way back to the section on western releases and you'll see an entry for Flying Dragon, a unique fighting game that included two completely different visual styles: Virtual Version (which looked extremely similar to Virtua Fighter) and SD Version (which featured smaller 'chibi' characters). SD Hiryu no Ken Densetsu is the sequel to Flying Dragon, and it completely ditches the Virtual Version to focus solely on the SD characters. In a sense, it could be considered a special edition of Flying Dragon's SD mode, because while the game adds a selection of new fighters to the existing roster and includes a new Story mode, the actual fighting mechanics remain similar to those of its predecessor. ■

FACT

The story mode retells the story of Flying Dragon: The Secret Scroll on the NES, so if you've already played that then it should be somewhat familiar to you.

SHIN NIPPON PRO-WRESTLING: TOUKON ROAD – BRAVE SPIRITS

Year 1998
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Yuke's

SHIN NIPPON PRO-WRESTLING, better known in the west as New Japan Pro Wrestling (NJPW) was established in 1972 by legendary wrestler Antonio Inoki. A few NJPW games were released on the Super Famicom, but Toukon Road was the first to get the Nintendo 64 treatment. The game features 12 wrestlers, including the likes of Jushin Thunder Liger, Tiger Mask and Keiji Muto, whose alter-ego The Great Muta is also one of the three hidden unlockable wrestlers. The controls are particularly interesting, with A and B performing punches and kicks, and the Z button needing to be held down to initiate grapple moves. Although developer Yuke's would go on to make the Smackdown! games for THQ, the engine here is completely different. ■

FACT

In 2005 it was feared that NJPW was going to be subject to a hostile takeover by an unknown company, so Yuke's stepped in and bought out Inoki's shares to own the business.

SHIN NIPPON PRO-WRESTLING: TOUKON ROAD 2 – THE NEXT GENERATION

Year 1998
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Yuke's

IN A NICE slice of symmetry, Toukon Road was the first N64 release of 1998 in Japan, and its sequel was the last. The second N64 NJPW game builds on its predecessor in every way, most notably by ramping up the roster to 21 wrestlers plus five hidden ones (including Antonio Inoki himself, who was 55 by then but had only just retired that year and could still probably boot a backside or two). The main addition, however, is the new MVP mode, which is basically a season mode where you pick a wrestler and compete in five events per month, taking on various singles and tag matches in an attempt to win titles and unlock the hidden wrestlers. ■

FACT

Antonio Inoki once took on Ric Flair in North Korea in two fights that drew audiences of 150,000 and 190,000, the most in any wrestling match in history.

SIN AND PUNISHMENT

Year	2000
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Treasure

OF ALL THE Japan-only Nintendo 64 games, Sin & Punishment is easily the most well-known, and was considered for years to be one of the best Nintendo-published titles never released in the west. Developed by action game specialists Treasure, the game is set in the future (the year 2007), where a global famine is threatening human extinction. It's decided to create a new genetically engineered species which can be raised to be used purely for food, but something goes wrong and they mutate then start to attack humans. It's up to Saki and Aran, the game's two playable characters, to take down both these creatures (known as the Ruffians) and the Armed Volunteers, an international peacekeeping group which also turns out to be corrupt. The game is an on-rails shooter in which players use the Control Stick to move a crosshair around and shoot enemies, while at the same time using the C buttons to move their character around avoiding bullets and obstacles. At first it's a bit like patting your head and rubbing your belly at the same time but once it clicks it's considered one of the best action games on the N64. Two console generations passed before western players were finally able to officially buy Sin & Punishment, when Nintendo released the game on the Wii Virtual Console service in 2007 (and again on the Wii U in 2015). Then, when Nintendo's Switch Online service received a library of N64 games in 2021, Sin & Punishment was there on day one. ■

FACT

A sequel called Sin & Punishment: Star Successor was released on the Wii in 2010 and used the Wii Remote to control the crosshair, which worked so much better.

SIMCITY 2000

Year	1998
Publisher	Imagineer
Developer	Maxis / Genki

ALTHOUGH THE 64DD would get a Nintendo-published take on SimCity, Japanese N64 owners also got a more straightforward console port of PC game SimCity 2000 a couple of years earlier. SimCity 2000 doesn't have any of the nifty 3D effects of SimCity 64 and instead opts for a similar sprite-based art style like its PC big brother, but it does have a couple of extra features that are exclusive to the N64. These include a virtual pet which lets you breed monsters, a horse-racing mini-game where you can bet to earn more money to spend on your city and a dating simulator sub-game for some reason. These additions didn't make up for the lack of mouse support (the N64 mouse didn't exist until the 64DD launched). ■

FACT

One of the natural disasters in the N64 version is a giant monster attack. If you've been playing the monster breeding virtual pet mini-game, you can use your monster to fight the invading one.

SUPER B-DAMAN: BATTLE PHOENIX 64

Year	1998
Publisher	Hudson Soft
Developer	Hudson Soft

B-DAMAN WAS A series of toy robots in Japan – many of which were designed to look like Bomberman – which shot marbles out of their stomachs. The Takara-based toys were popular enough to spawn manga, anime and a handful of video games, including Battle Phoenix 64. The game has two main modes: a Battle Mode, where players try to bump other robots off a stage by shooting at them, and the B-Da mode, which consists of 10 shooting-based mini-games. The latter includes such tasks as shooting the mouths of giant T-Rexes chasing after you, trying to pot billiard balls by firing your marbles at them, and of course your obligatory mole attack challenge where you have to hit them as they leap out of their holes. ■

FACT

The word 'bidama' means 'marble' in Japan, so the name B-Daman is quite a clever pun because it's a play on both 'marble man' and Bomberman.

SUPER MARIO 64 SHINDOU PAK TAIOU VERSION

Year 1997
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD

BECAUSE THE RUMBLE Pak didn't arrive until after the Nintendo 64's launch, this meant none of the console's launch games supported the peripheral. Nintendo decided to remedy this by re-releasing an improved version of Super Mario 64 in Japan. As well as Rumble Pak support, it also added a few bug fixes that had been introduced in the western version of the game. The only other major difference was that when Mario throws Bowser by the tail he no longer says 'so long-a Bowser', he just says 'bye bye'. Conspiracy theorists claimed this was because Mario actually said 'so long gay Bowser' and Nintendo wanted to remove the offending line, but it was really just because Bowser is called Koopa in Japan. ■

FACT

The Shindou Pak Taiou Version has an easter egg on the title screen, where holding down the Z button covers the screen in Mario faces (as you can see in the screenshot).

SUPER ROBOT SPIRITS

Year 1998
Publisher Banpresto
Developer Banpresto

SOMETIMES THERE'S NOTHING like seeing giant robots punching lumps of metal out of each other. Banpresto clearly agreed, which is why it released Super Robot Spirits, a spin-off of its Super Robot Wars series of RPG titles. Like its turn-based siblings, Super Robot Spirits is a crossover title containing characters from a variety of popular Japanese mech anime series, including the likes of Mobile Fighter G Gundam, Invincible Steel Man Daitarn 3 and Dancouga: Super Beast Machine God. Unlike the main series, however, this is a one-on-one fighting game featuring a standard versus mode and a brief Story mode which consists of separate 'episodes'. The game sold quite poorly in Japan following negative reviews. ■

FACT

The series got its first ever western release in 2021 with Super Robot Wars 30, which was made to celebrate its 30th anniversary. It was released on Switch, PS4 and PC, with the PC version released on Steam in the west.

SUPER ROBOT WARS 64

Year 1999
Publisher Banpresto
Developer AI

WHILE SUPER ROBOT Spirits didn't quite hit the mark for fans of the Super Robot Wars series, this was the sort of thing they were looking for. Super Robot Wars 64 was the eleventh main tactical RPG in the series, and featured mechs from a host of other properties including Getter Robo, Mazinger, Giant Robo, GoShogun and Six God Combination Godmars, with a load of Gundams thrown in for good measure. The game has two campaigns called Real Robot and Super Robot, each offering the option to play as a male or female pilot (each with their own mech). Technically, then, there are four stories, and while each includes 20 missions there's some crossover, meaning there are 32 stages in total. ■

FACT

The game has Transfer Pak support: by combining it with Game Boy Color title Super Robot Wars Link Battler, you can unlock new mechs in the N64 game.

SUSUME! TAISEN PUZZLE DAMA: TOUKON! MARUTAMA CHOU

Year 1998
Publisher Konami
Developer KCEK

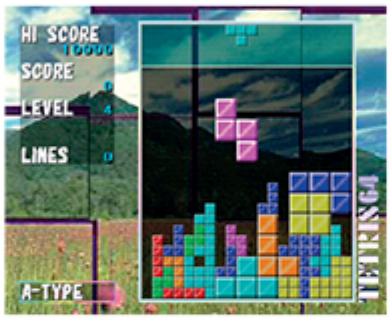
THE TAISEN PUZZLE Dama series was Konami's take on Puyo-Puyo, and by 'take' I mean it took the entire idea and just added a couple of extra bits. As in the Puyo-Puyo games, players drop coloured balls in an attempt to make similarly coloured balls touch. There are two main differences here: first, you only have to match three balls instead of four. Secondly, when you clear a combo you add blocks containing balls to your opponent's screen. These blocks have to be matched before the balls inside them are released, meaning they basically have to be cleared twice. This N64 release is a port of the sixth game, which was released in arcades and on PlayStation in 1996, but adds new characters. ■

FACT

Konami has released a number of Taisen Puzzle Dama spin-off games over the years, featuring the likes of TwinBee, Tokimeki Memorial and even Castlevania.

TETRIS 64

Year 1998
Publisher SETA Corporation
Developer Amtex



ONE OF THE joys of the Nintendo 64 controller's little expansion port on the back is the number of peripherals that can be plugged into it, like the Controller Pak, Rumble Pak and Game Boy Transfer Pak. Tetris 64 took things in an odder direction with the Bio Sensor, a gizmo that plugged into the controller and was wired to a sensor that clipped onto your ear. The Bio Sensor reads your heart rate as you play the game, and raises or lowers the difficulty depending on how stressed you're getting. If you aren't into such sci-fi shenanigans the game includes some other interesting features such as Giga Tetris, an exhausting mode which lets you increase the width of the playing area up to 20 blocks. ■

FACT

The Wii Vitality Sensor was a planned product that would act similarly to the Bio Sensor by using a player's finger to measure their pulse. The idea was ultimately scrapped.

UCCHAN NANCHAN NO HONOU NO CHALLENGER: DENRYU IRA IRA BO

Year 1997
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Yuke's

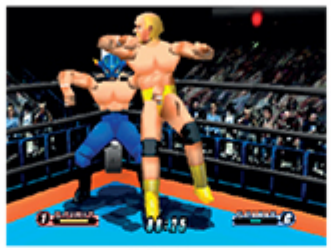
DO YOU REALLY need an explanation for this one? The title explains it, surely. Okay, fine: it's based on a Japanese game show whose name roughly translates to Ucchan Nanchan's Challenge of Fire: 1 Million Yen If You Can Do This. One of the show's challenges is an advanced version of that fairground game where you have to move a hoop along a big twisty wire without touching the sides. This Nintendo 64 recreation naturally makes use of the analogue stick, with players trying to make their way through a series of mazes without hitting the boundaries. The pressure's on, though, because each maze has checkpoints that have to be hit within a certain time. ■

FACT

Jaleco released a similar game for the PlayStation the following year, also based on the game TV show. This one was actually released in North America, under the brilliant title Irritating Stick.

VIRTUAL PRO WRESTLING 64

Year 1997
Publisher Asmik Ace Entertainment
Developer AKI Corporation



WHILE THE AKI-DEVELOPED THQ wrestling games are considered among the greatest ever released in the west, Japan got its own equivalents too. Virtual Pro Wrestling is a heavily modified version of WCW vs nWo World Tour (which had only reached the west a month earlier). While it includes most of the WCW and nWo wrestlers from that game, it also has a bunch of other Japanese wrestlers from various promotions: though the promotion names couldn't be used for licensing reasons, they're supposed to be the likes of New Japan Pro Wrestling, All Japan Pro Wrestling and Michinoku Pro Wrestling. There are also a number of unlockable legends, including Andre the Giant, Bruiser Brody, the Dynamite Kid and Terry Funk. ■

FACT

Antonio Inoki is a hidden wrestler in the game. If you unlock him then win a title with him you'll unlock four boxers: Muhammad Ali, Karl Mildenberger, Leon Spinks and Michael Spinks.

VIRTUAL PRO WRESTLING 2: OUDOU KEISHOU

Year 2000
Publisher Asmik Ace Entertainment
Developer AKI Corporation

BY THE TIME Virtual Pro Wrestling was due a sequel in Japan, AKI had already shifted over to making WWF games for THQ. Virtual Pro Wrestling 2 uses the same engine as WWF WrestleMania 2000, then, but unlike its predecessor's WCW ties there are no WWF wrestlers in this game. Instead, the nearly 100 wrestlers on offer come from a variety of Japanese organisations, though only All Japan Pro Wrestling is officially licensed this time (others include the renamed equivalents of New Japan Pro Wrestling, Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling, Pancrase and BattlARTS). While the game plays similarly to WrestleMania 2000, some old AKI mechanics that had been ditched for the WWF games (like the test of strength and striking combos) were retained to suit Japanese-style wrestling. ■

FACT

The game has a Create a Belt mode, which was originally going to include Steve Austin's Smokin' Skull Belt from the WWF. It was eventually removed, but can still be found with cheat cartridges.

WAVE RACE 64 SHINDOU PAK TAIO VERSION

Year 1997
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo EAD

WAVE RACE 64 was another N64 game that would have benefitted from Rumble Pak support but was released before the peripheral. As with Super Mario 64, then, Nintendo decided to re-release the game with added support for the Rumble Pak, meaning players could now feel every wave beneath them (or every smack against a wall if it turned out they weren't very good at it). The rumble support wasn't the only thing added to this version: Nintendo also added the ability to race against ghosts in Time Trial mode, represented by dolphins rather than other racers. It also re-recorded some of the announcer lines and remixed some of the music. ■

FACT

When Wave Race 64 was released on the Wii Virtual Console, Nintendo's Kawasaki licensing had expired so the various Kawasaki banners in the game were replaced with ads for the Wii and DS.

WONDER PROJECT J2: KORURO NO MORI NO JOZETTO

Year 1996
Publisher Enix
Developer Givro Corporation

THE BISHOUJO GENRE has been massive in Japan for decades. Translated roughly as 'pretty girl', a bishoujo game is usually a visual novel where the aim is to interact with an attractive female. Wonder Project J2 is a more interesting take on it, because the girl in question is Josette, a robot. You can't interact with Josette directly: instead, you use a little robot bird to show her things in the world, then answer her yes/no questions to try and help her earn 25 achievements, including learning how to cook, learning how to sing and learning how to understand life and love. The second half of the game is more plot-driven as an army is sent out to find and capture her. ■

FACT

The game is a sequel to Wonder Project J, which instead had you directing a small robot boy called Pino, who has a fairy friend called Tinker. It's basically Pinocchio with shades of Peter Pan, then.

YAKOCHU II: SATSUJIN KORO

Year 1999
Publisher Athena
Developer Athena

THIS VISUAL NOVEL is the second game in Athena's Yakochu series, though its plot is completely unrelated to that of the first game, which was released on the Super Famicom. The subtitle for this one translates loosely to Murder Route, and takes place on a ship called the *Dynasty*, which is enjoying its maiden voyage. Suddenly, the boat is rocked by a huge explosion, and the passengers escape on lifeboats. After floating aimlessly on the water, the player is rescued by another ship called *Pandora*, but it turns out this one's even less safe than the *Dynasty*, because there's a murderer on board. You have to find out who the killer is, though the game does have multiple endings. ■

FACT

Yakochu roughly translates to 'luminous insect'. The first game is also about a crisis on a ship, though this time the vessel is called *Diana*.

ZOOL: MAJOU TSUKAI DENSETSU

Year 1999
Publisher Imagineer
Developer Pandora Box

IN THE WORLD of Zool, humans and demons peacefully co-exist. While the two generally keep themselves to themselves, there are occasions where special humans called 'demon masters' will team up with a demon and go on adventures with them. The player controls one such young demon master, a 10-year-old boy called Leo who encounters a demon called Bernie. The pair hit it off and go adventuring together. In a sense, Zool is similar to Pokémon in that the player can collect more monsters (of which there are over 160) and form teams with them, though the emphasis is on befriending them rather than capturing them. Combat is turn-based but you can only assign vague instructions to your demons: Attack, Defend, Support or Run Away. ■

FACT

Technically the game's title is Zuru because these are the sounds made by the katakana that make it up. This has been translated to Zoor by some websites, but 'R' and 'L' can be interchangeable in the Japanese language, and Zool feels like a better fit.

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The fourth book in Chris Scullion's critically acclaimed series of video game encyclopedias, The N64 Encyclopedia is dedicated to the Nintendo 64, one of the most well-loved games consoles ever released. Although the Nintendo 64 didn't sell as well as some of Nintendo's other systems, and although it struggled in the shadow of the bold newcomer that was the Sony PlayStation, everyone who owned an N64 was in love with it and the four-player multiplayer it provided as standard. Despite its relatively small library, the Nintendo 64 had a healthy number of groundbreaking titles that would revolutionise the way we played video games. The likes of Super Mario 64, GoldenEye 007, Mario Kart 64 and The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time remain iconic in the eyes of video game fans 25 years down the line. This book naturally contains those games, but it also contains every other game released for the system, no matter how obscure. It also covers every game released in Japan, including those for the ill-fated Nintendo 64DD add-on which never left the country. With over 400 games covered, screenshots for every title and a light-hearted writing style designed to make reading it a fun experience, the N64 Encyclopedia is the definitive guide to a truly revolutionary gaming system.

Chris Scullion is a Scottish video game journalist with more than 15 years of experience writing about games professionally. He's been playing games since the early '80s and is the author of the *NES, SNES* and *Mega Drive Encyclopedias* for Pen and Sword Books / White Owl Books. Although he's best known for his six years at the UK's *Official Nintendo Magazine*, he's also written for the likes of *Computer & Video Games, Official Xbox Magazine, Official PlayStation Magazine, Nintendo Life and Retro Gamer*. Chris is currently the Features Editor for *Video Games Chronicle* (VGC).